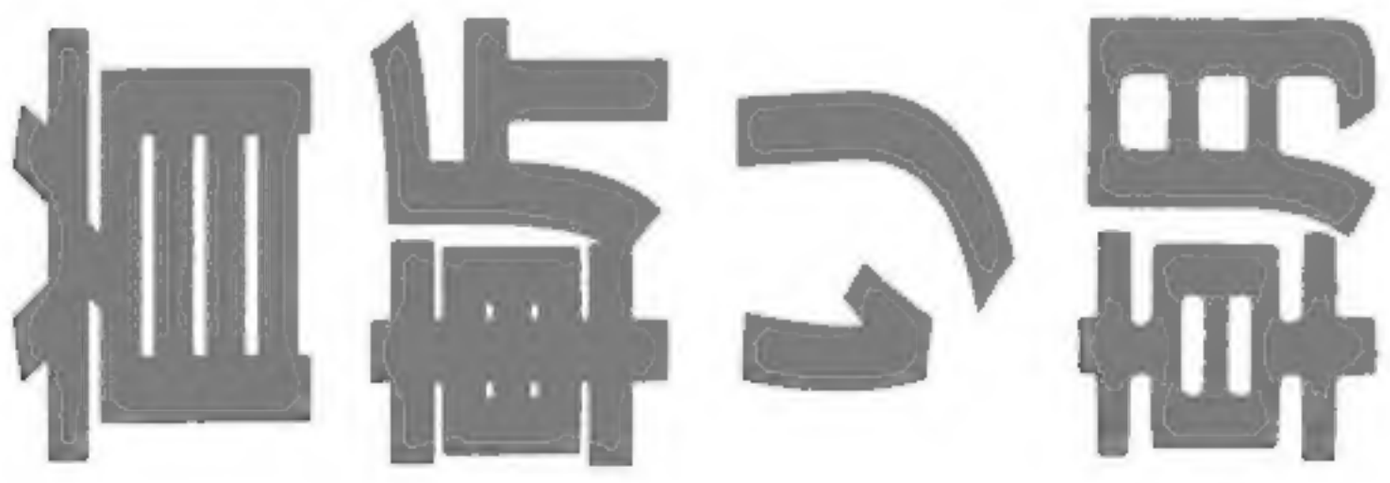
SAMURAI EXECUTIONER

首斬り朝

VOLUME 4 **PORTRAIT OF DEATH**

By KAZUO KOIKE & GOSEKI KOJIMA



SAMURAI 首斬り朝 EXECUTIONER

Punished is not the man himself,
but the evil that resides in him.

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首斬り朝

PORTRAIT OF DEATH

By **KAZUO KOIKE**
& GOSEKI KOJIMA

VOLUME

4

A NOTE TO READERS

Samurai Executioner is a carefully researched re-creation of Edo-Period Japan. To preserve the flavor of the work, we have chosen to retain many Edo-Period terms that have no direct equivalents in English. Japanese is written in a mix of Chinese ideograms and a syllabic writing system, resulting in numerous synonyms. In the glossary, you may encounter words with multiple meanings. These are words written with Chinese ideograms that are pronounced the same but carry different meanings. A Japanese reader seeing the different ideograms would know instantly which meaning it is, but these synonyms can cause confusion when Japanese is spelled out in our alphabet. *O-yurushi o* (please forgive us)!

SAMURAI EXECUTIONER

首斬り朝

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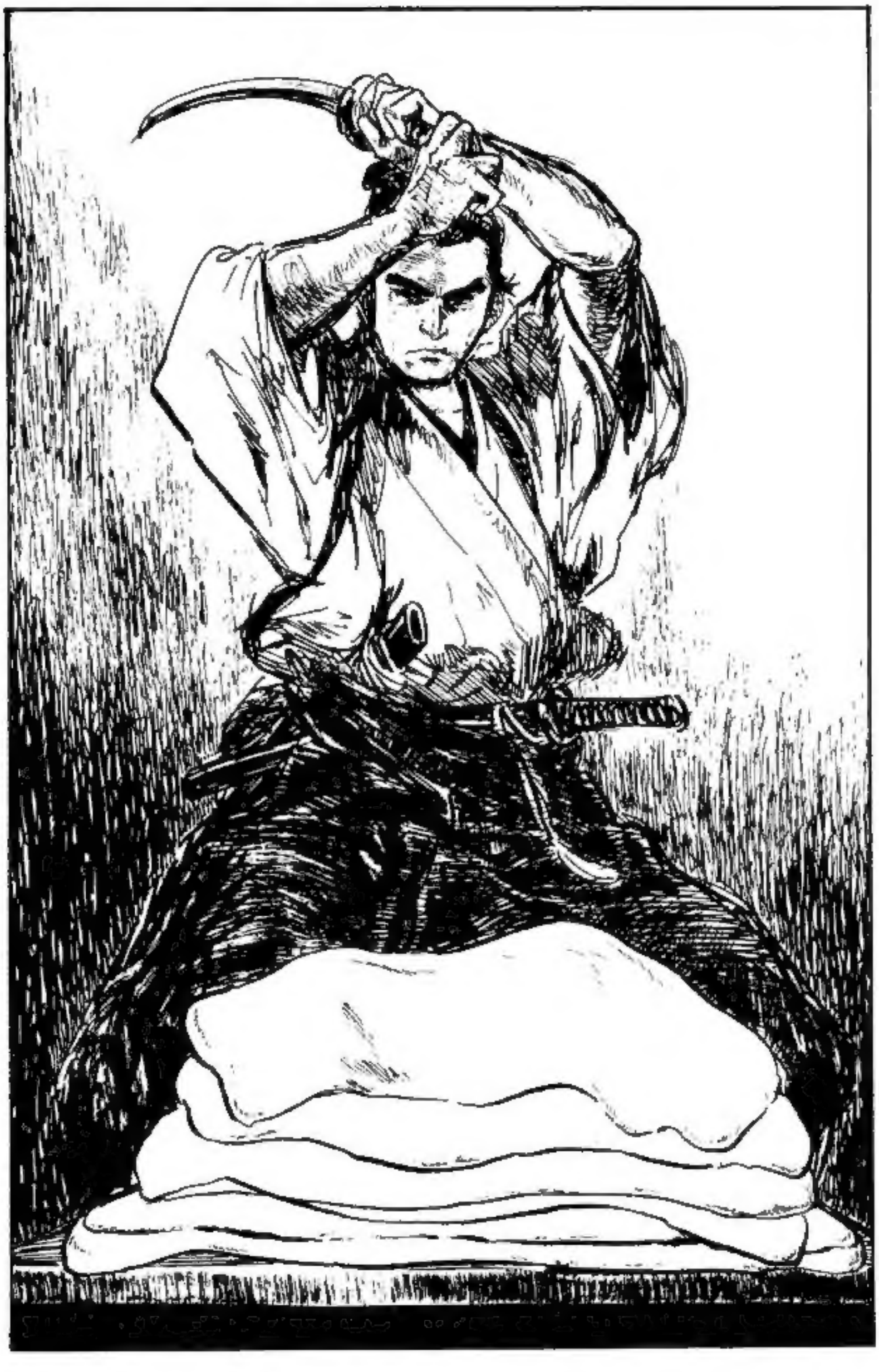

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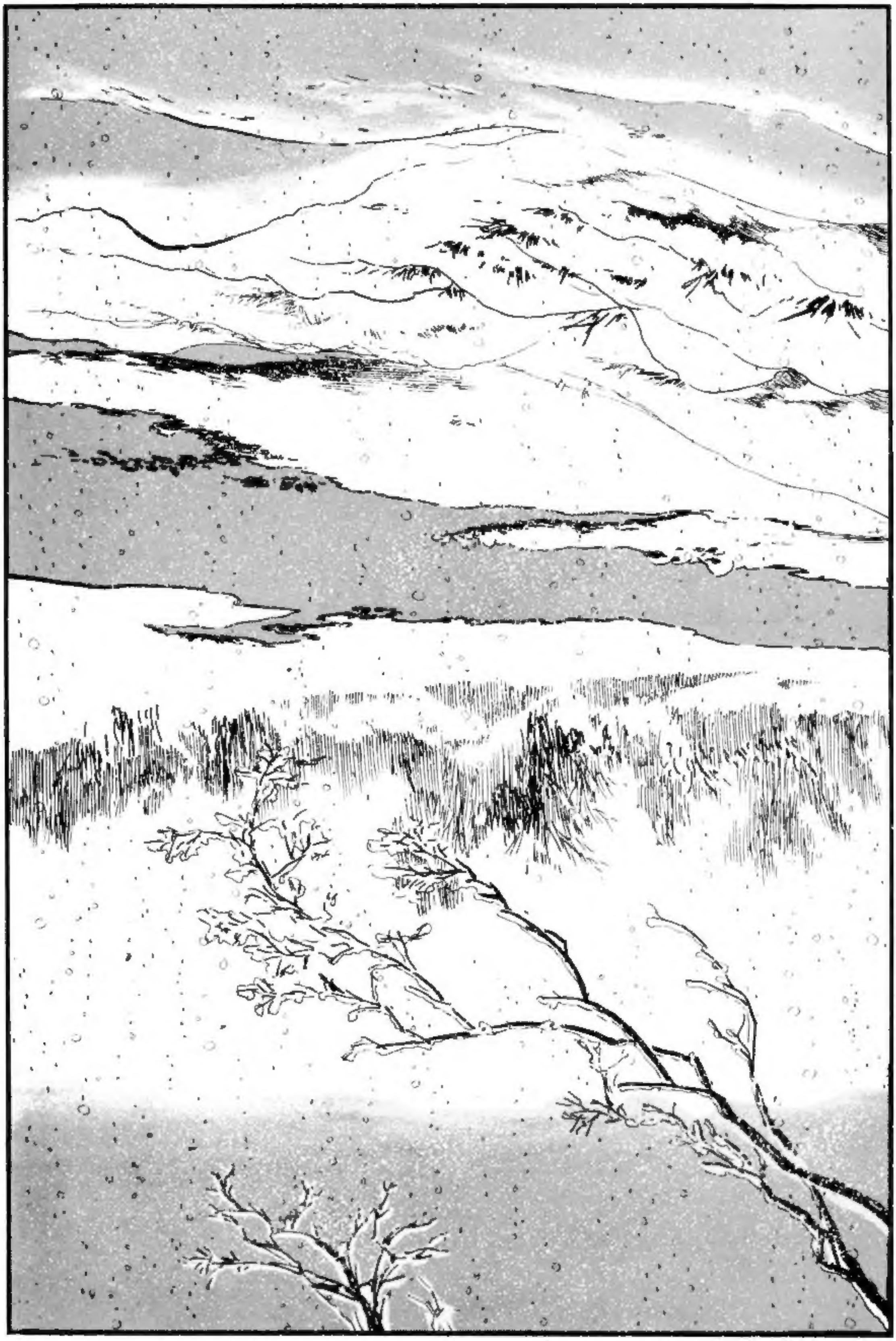
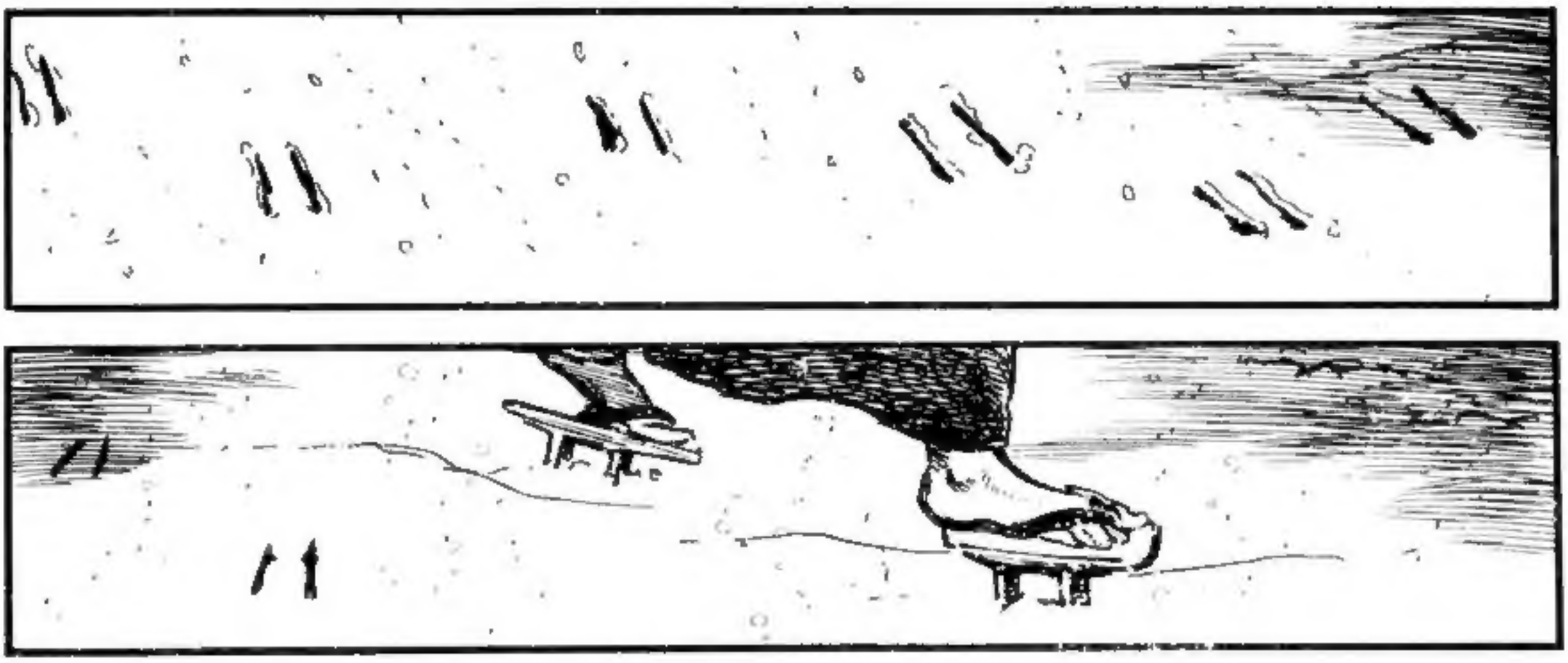
An Offering of Cut Mochi





WAAAH!

WAAAAAGH!

WAAARGH!

LOOKS LIKE THE *HŌRAKU* DRILL.

THE *HŌRAKU* DRILL WAS POPULAR AMONG SAMURAI DURING THIS PERIOD. *HŌRAKU* WERE PLAIN UNGLAZED SHALLOW EARTHEN PANS. SAMURAI WORE *HŌRAKU* ON THEIR FOREHEADS AS THEY PRACTICED ATTACKING EACH OTHER TO DETERMINE WHO WAS BEST.

WHOEVER HAD HIS *HŌRAKU* STRUCK WAS TREATED AS IF HE WERE *DEAD*.

THE SAMURAI WERE SPLIT INTO TWO GROUPS. THE GROUP THAT STRUCK THE *HŌRAKU* OF THE OTHER GROUP'S LEADER WAS THE WINNER.

WAAARGH!

URRRGH!

YOU'RE NOT GONNA BREAK *MY* *HORAKU!*

COME ON!

HERE GOES!

OLIH!

GUH!

TOUH!

YAH!

YAH!

YAH!

YAAH!

DWAAH!

BANG!

CRACK!

CRACK!

WHOOSH!

DAAAH!

TAKE *THAT!*

OOF!

ANOTHER ONE!

OUH!

TAAAKE *THAT!*

CRACK!

TOUH!

CRACK!

ONLY THE *LEADER'S* LEFT!

I'M GONNA GET HIM!

TAAAH!

OUH! OUH!

CRACK!

CRACK!

AAAR-
AAARGH!

OUUUH!

BANG!

BANG!

CRAACK!

HE GOT ME!

THAT'S ALL FOR TODAY.

I'M *HUNGRY.*

ME TOO. I CAN'T FIGHT ANYMORE.

HA, HA. 'CAUSE YOU'RE HUNGRY, HUH?

HMMM.

WHO WAS THAT GUY WATCHING US PRACTICE?

WELL, HE LOOKS LIKE HE COULD BE A *RONIN*.

HE'S EXCEPTIONALLY POLITE BY TODAY'S STANDARDS.

HE FOLDED UP HIS UMBRELLA BECAUSE HE WAS ASHAMED TO IMPOLITELY WATCH US. AND HE'S *BAREFOOT* IN THE COLD WITHOUT A *WATAIRE* OR A *HAORI*.

SO WE'RE *NOT* THE ONLY *REAL* MEN AFTER ALL!

I *LIKE* HIM. LET'S CALL HIM.

I HAPPENED TO BE WATCHING YOU PRACTICE...

...AND I THOUGHT IT'D BE RUDE TO LEAVE WITHOUT SAYING ANYTHING, SO I'D LIKE TO OFFER MY GREETINGS.

WE ARE MUCH OBLIGED.

PLEASE EXCUSE ME.

FWOOP

WAIT!

I AM *AOKI YAJIRŌ*. IF IT WOULD NOT BE TOO MUCH TROUBLE, MAY WE OFFER YOU A DRINK SO THAT WE COULD BECOME BETTER ACQUAINTED?

I AM *YAMADA ASAEMON*.

I APPRECIATE YOUR INVITATION, BUT I AM NOT FOND OF SAKÉ... PLEASE FORGIVE ME.

YOU'RE *YAMADA ASAEMON-DONO*?

WELL, THEN WE'D *STILL* LIKE TO GET TO KNOW YOU.

SURELY WE COULD ALSO DO A LITTLE *SUIMONO-GIRI*.

IF WE CAN'T OFFER YOU SAKÉ..., HOW ABOUT SOME *MOCHI*?

WE ALL LOVE *MOCHI*. IT'S *HARAMOCHI*, *NAGAMOCHI*, AND *MOCHITSU MOTARETSU*--JUST WHAT OUR EMPTY STOMACHS NEED AFTER A WORKOUT!

SO WHY DON'T WE EAT SOME *MOCHI* AND BECOME *TOMOMOCHI*?

HA, HA. KASHIWAGI'S BAD PUNS *TASTE* LIKE *MOCHI*.

HA HA HA HA

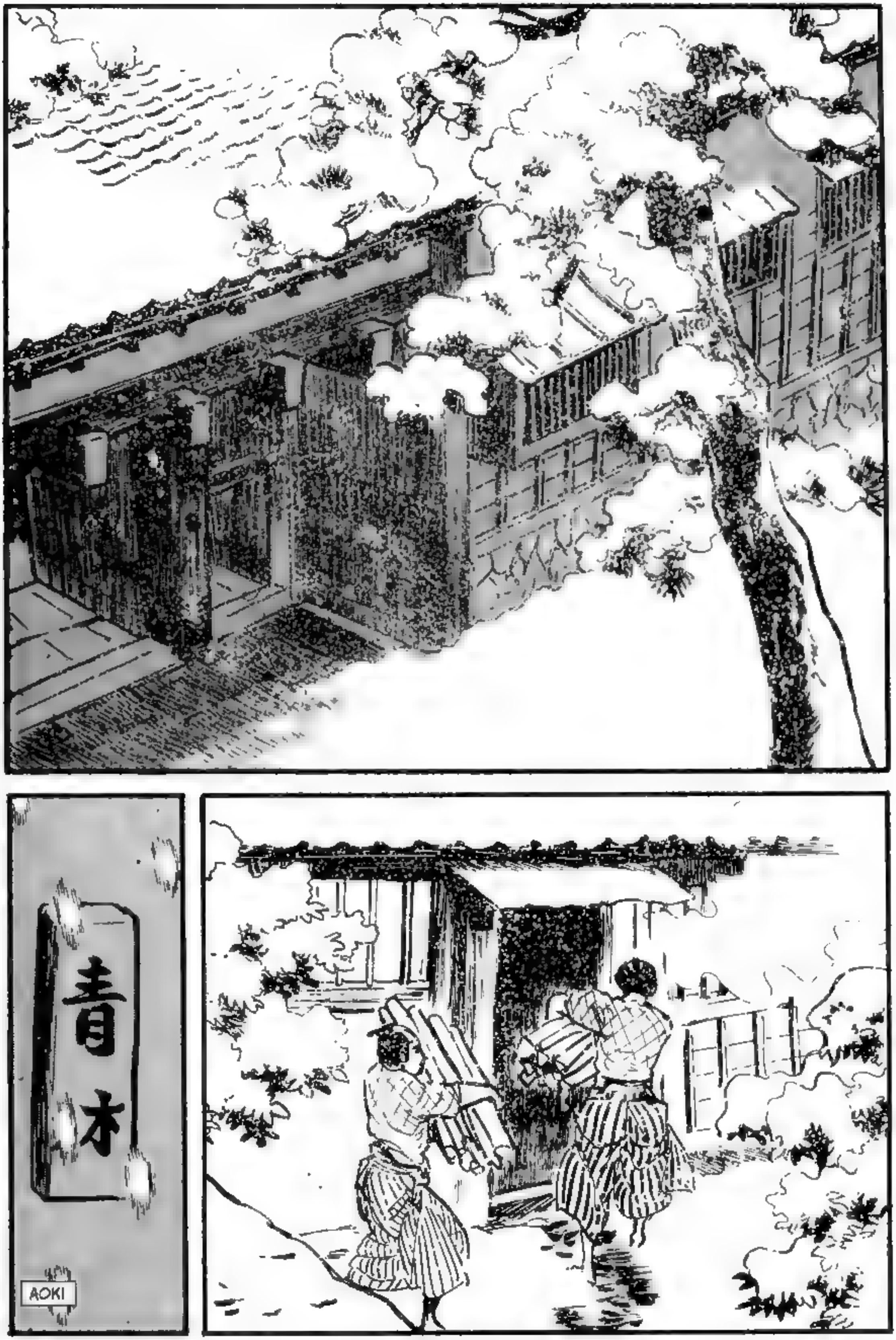
HA HA HA

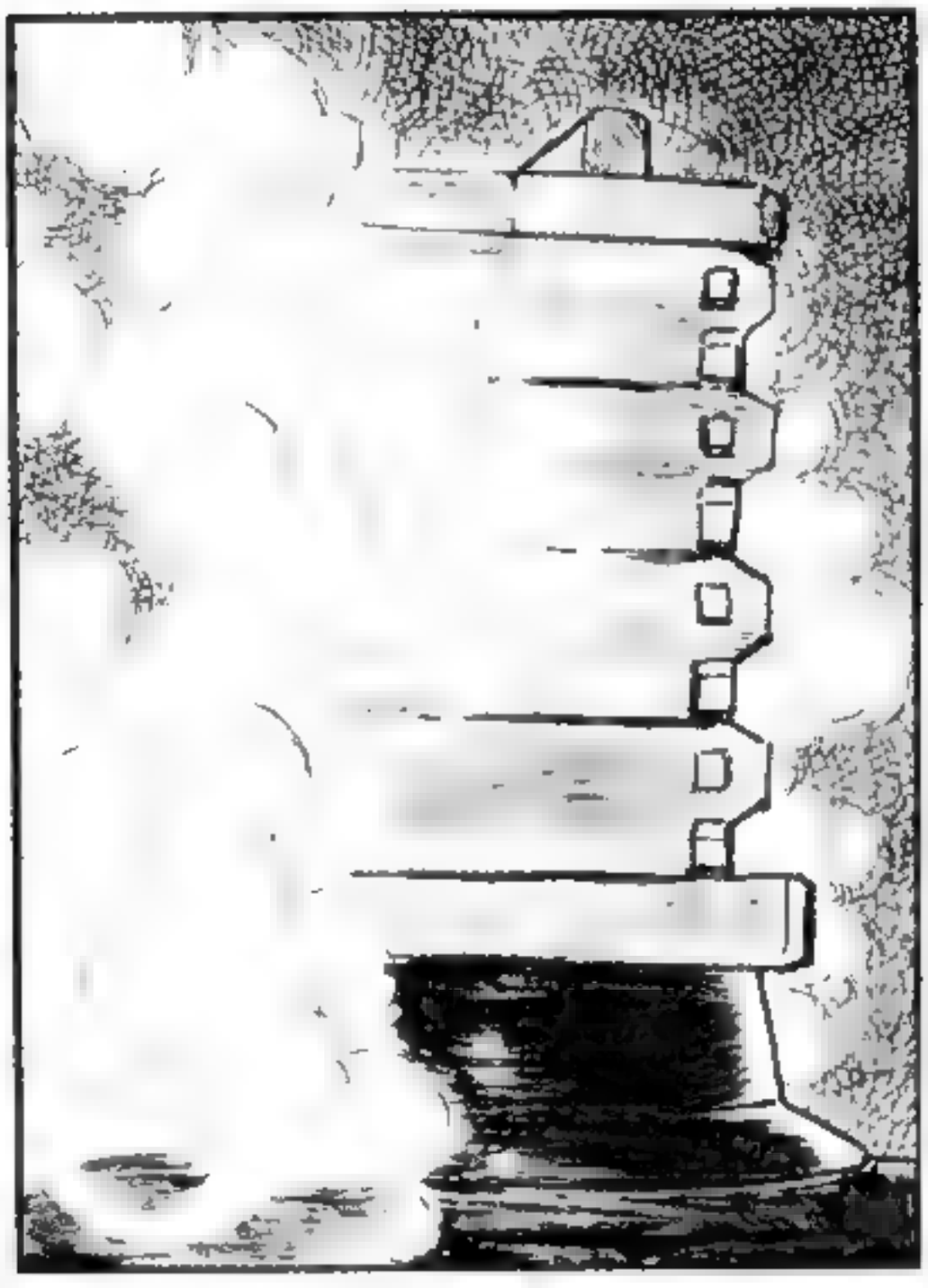
HA HA HA HA HA HA

HA HA HA HA HA

THERE WAS *SOMETHING* IN THE WAY THESE MEN DEALT WITH EACH OTHER.

THIS WAS AN ENCOUNTER THAT WOULD LEAD TO THE ONE AND ONLY *TRAGIC* FRIENDSHIP THAT YAMADA ASAEMON WOULD EVER HAVE.


青木
AOKI



SHLP
SHH

CROSS YOUR LEGS.

I DON'T KNOW WHO DECIDED *THAT* WAS THE RIGHT WAY TO SIT, BUT HE MUST'VE BEEN A FOOL WHO DIDN'T KNOW THE MARTIAL ARTS.

THOUGH IT MAY NOT BE A GOOD IDEA TO RELAX YOUR LEGS IN AN EMERGENCY...

INDEED. IN THE *SENGOKU* PERIOD, MEN CROSSED THEIR LEGS.

IT WAS THE *RIGHT* WAY FOR A WARRIOR TO SIT. SO RELAX.

YES, I SHOULD.

I AM *KASHIWAGI UKON* OF THE *KOBUSHINGUMI* WITH A STIPEND OF THIRTY *HYŌ* FOR TWO.

I AM *TSUDA IPPEI*, ALSO OF THE *KOBUSHINGUMI*.

PLEASED TO MEET YOU!

YOU MUST BE WONDERING WHY EVERYONE GOT TOGETHER TO MAKE SO MUCH NOISE.

WE *ALL* BELONG TO THE *KOBUSHINGUMI*.

WE MAY BE *JIKISAN*, BUT *NONE* OF US HAVE POSTS. WE'RE JUST A BUNCH OF DIRT-POOR NOBODIES.

BUT SINCE I GET A HEREDITARY STIPEND OF SEVEN HUNDRED *KOKU*, I DON'T HAVE ANY TROUBLE EATING.

HOWEVER, IT'D BE *WRONG* IF ONLY I GOT TO EAT JUST BECAUSE OF MY ANCESTORS.

THAT'S WHY WE GET TOGETHER TO EAT.

WE LIVE OFF AOKI-*DONO*.

SO, YAMADA-*DONO*...

SINCE YOU'RE NOT A *JIKISAN*, THERE'S SOMETHING I'D REALLY LIKE TO ASK YOU.

THOSE WHO ARE SAMURAI ARE SUPPOSED TO SERVE WITH DEATH ALWAYS IN THEIR HEARTS.

BUT YOU HAVE NO LORD. SO WHAT IS IN *YOUR* HEART AS YOU TREAD THE WAY OF THE WARRIOR?

WOULD YOU MIND TELLING US, IF IT'S NOT TOO MUCH TROUBLE?

A BATTLE WITH *MYSELF*...

WOULD *THAT* BE AN ANSWER?

WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY "MYSELF"?

YOU HAVE BEEN ON THE WAY OF THE WARRIOR SINCE *BIRTH*. BECAUSE YOU ARE VASSALS, IT IS NATURAL THAT YOU ARE VALUED FOR BEING WARRIORS WITH DEATH ALWAYS IN YOUR HEARTS.

BUT A *RONIN* LIKE ME WALKS A DIFFERENT PATH CONSISTING ONLY OF BIRTH, LIFE, AND DEATH.

IT IS NOT THE WAY OF THE WARRIOR. IT IS A PATH NO DIFFERENT FROM THAT OF THE COMMON MAN.
DEPENDING ON YOUR JUDGMENT, THIS MAY OR MAY NOT BE THE WAY OF THE WARRIOR. IT IS UP TO *YOU* TO DECIDE WHETHER THIS PATH IS FIT FOR A SAMURAI.

HOW TRUE.

WE HAVE BEEN DEEPLY MOVED BY YOUR WORDS.

...WHICH IS AS WE EXPECTED, YAMADA-*DONO*.
ALTHOUGH THERE IS ONE MORE THING I WOULD LIKE TO ASK YOU...
WE DON'T MEAN TO BOMBARD YOU WITH QUESTIONS.

WE HAVE A LOT OF DOUBTS ABOUT THE WAY WE'VE BEEN LIVING UP UNTIL NOW, AND THAT'S WHY WE'D LIKE TO ASK YOU SOMETHING.

ALTHOUGH WE ARE VASSALS OF THE TOKUGAWA, WE CAN'T LIVE OFF OUR STIPENDS AND WE HAVE TO CLING ONTO AOKI-*SAMA*'S GENEROSITY JUST TO *SURVIVE*.

WE'RE SUPPOSED TO BE *JIKISAN*, BUT WE'RE LIKE *MATAMONO* --LIKE *PARASITES!*

WE CAN EITHER DIE FOR THE TOKUGAWA, OR DIE TO REPAY AOKI-*SAMA*'S FRIENDSHIP.

BUT WE ONLY HAVE *ONE* LIFE TO GIVE.

FOR *WHOM* SHOULD WE DIE? WHICH IS THE *TRUE* WAY OF THE WARRIOR?

AND *HOW* SHALL WE SERVE? EVEN THOUGH WE ARE *JIKISAN*, WE HAVE *NO* OFFICIAL POSTS. IT'S AS IF WE'RE TRYING TO DIE IN FRONT OF OUR LORD'S HORSE AND WE CAN'T EVEN GET A PLACE TO DIE!

RECEIVING STIPENDS WHILE BEING UNABLE TO SERVE IS A TORTURE WORSE THAN *DEATH!*

ALL WE *CAN* DO IS DEVOTE OURSELVES TO COMBAT TRAINING IN CASE SOMETHING COMES UP. THE *HORAKU* DRILL IS ONE OF OUR EXERCISES.

YAMADA-*DONO*, WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THOSE OF US IN THE *KOBUSHINGUMI*?

IS THERE SOME WAY THAT WE COULD LIVE AS VASSALS OF THE TOKUGAWA *AND* REPAY AOKI-*SAMA*'S FRIENDSHIP?

WE WOULD LIKE TO HEAR WHAT YOU HAVE TO SAY.

...
...

FRIENDSHIP AND THE WAY OF THE WARRIOR ARE NATURALLY TWO DIFFERENT THINGS.

NO SAMURAI CAN BE A VASSAL AND DIE FOR HIS FRIEND AT THE SAME TIME.

IF YOU WERE TO DIE FOR YOUR FRIEND, YOU WOULD HAVE TO GIVE UP YOUR STIPEND.

BUT...

THAT'S ENOUGH, TSUDA.

YES, SIR!

LOOKS LIKE THE SNOW'S STOPPED FALLING.

WHY DON'T WE MAKE SOME *CHIKARAMOCHI* IN THE GARDEN?

GOOD IDEA.

THUD
THUD

HOH!
POP
THUD

YAAH!

THUNK

HURGH!

THUD

HERE GOES!

YOH!

THUNK

HURGH!

WHOOMP

THUD

HOIH!

THUNK

THUD

THUNK

THE LIVES OF THE *GOKENIN* OF THE *KOBUSHINGUMI* WERE BITTER. SO WERE THEIR FEELINGS AS *JIKISAN*. THE FINANCES OF THE GOVERNMENT WERE EXTREMELY TIGHT AT THE TIME AND REAL ECONOMIC POWER WAS SHIFTING INTO THE HANDS OF THE TOWNSPEOPLE.

ALTHOUGH MANY SAMURAI WERE NEEDED DURING WARTIME, IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO ASSIGN POSTS TO ALL *HATAMOTO* AND *GOKENIN* DURING PEACETIME.

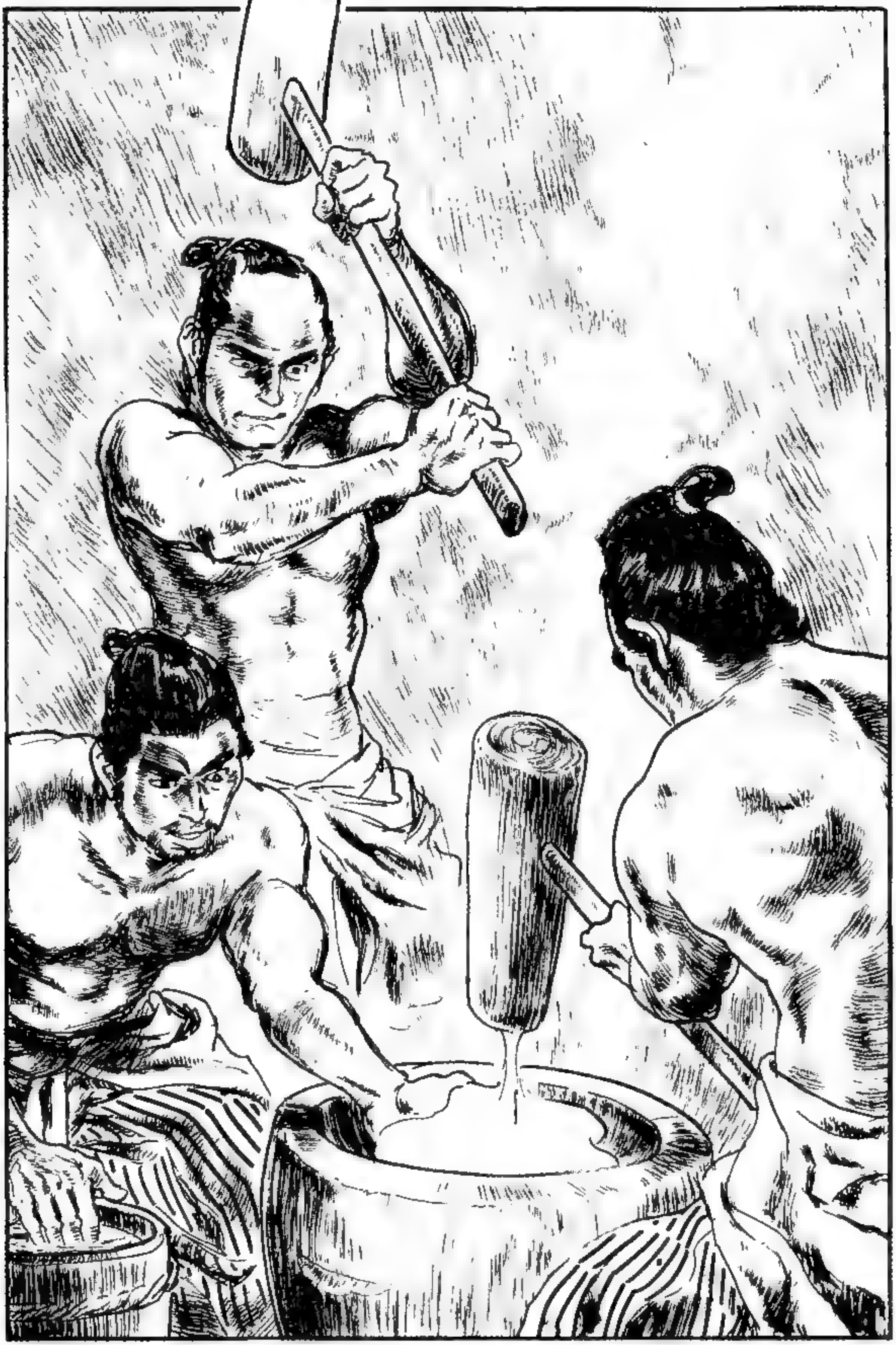
HENCE MANY SAMURAI HAD NO POSTS, AND THAT WAS WHY THE GOVERNMENT HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO ESTABLISH THE *YORIAI* AND *KOBUSHIN* SYSTEM.

THE GOVERNMENT DIVIDED THE *HATAMOTO* AND *GOKENIN* WITHOUT POSTS INTO TWO GROUPS:

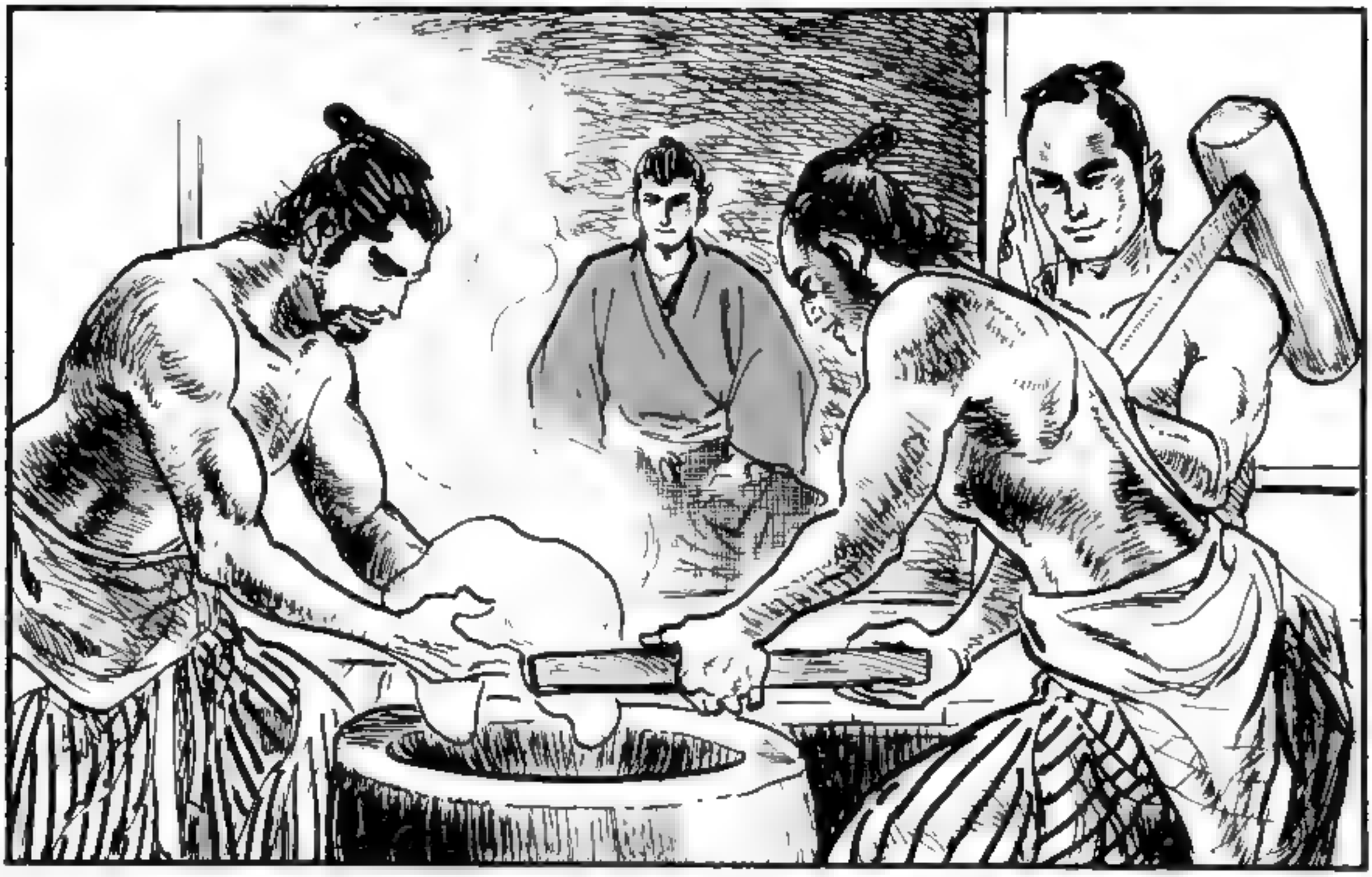
THE *YORIAI*, WHO RECEIVED BETWEEN THREE AND TEN THOUSAND *KOKU* OF RICE, AND THE *KOBUSHIN* WHO RECEIVED LESS THAN THREE THOUSAND *KOKU*.

THIS WAS THE BITTER WORLD OF THE SAMURAI.

AS A *RONIN*, ASAEMON COULD SEE THEM THROUGH A FELLOW SAMURAI'S EYES WITH A SADDENED HEART.



THUNK
THUD



HERE
IT
COMES.

SO WHAT DO YOU THINK, YAMADA-*DONO*?

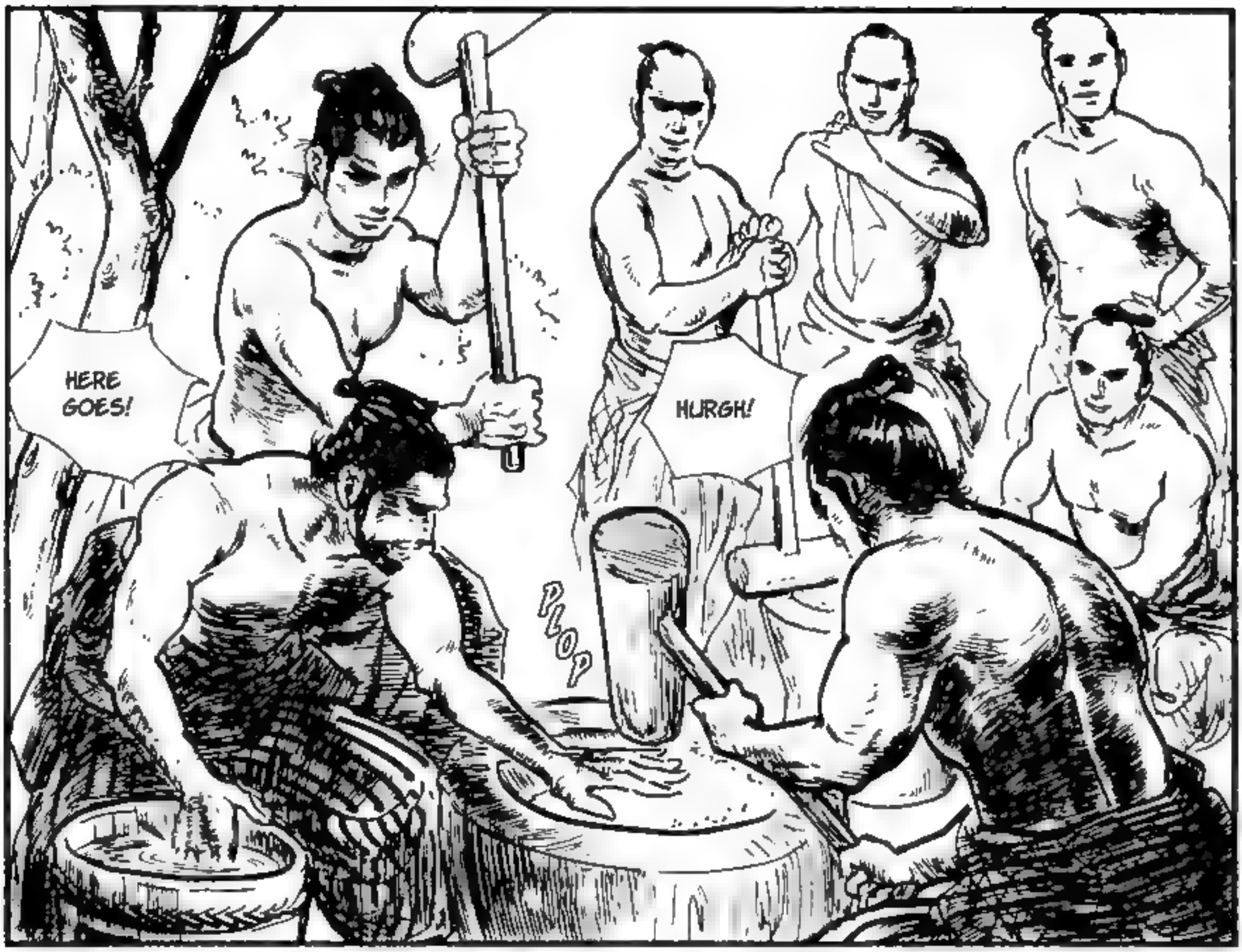
MOCHI-POUNDING IS PRETTY *TOUGH*.

YOU CAN'T POUND WITH TOO *MUCH* STRENGTH, AND YOU CAN'T WITH TOO *LITTLE* STRENGTH.

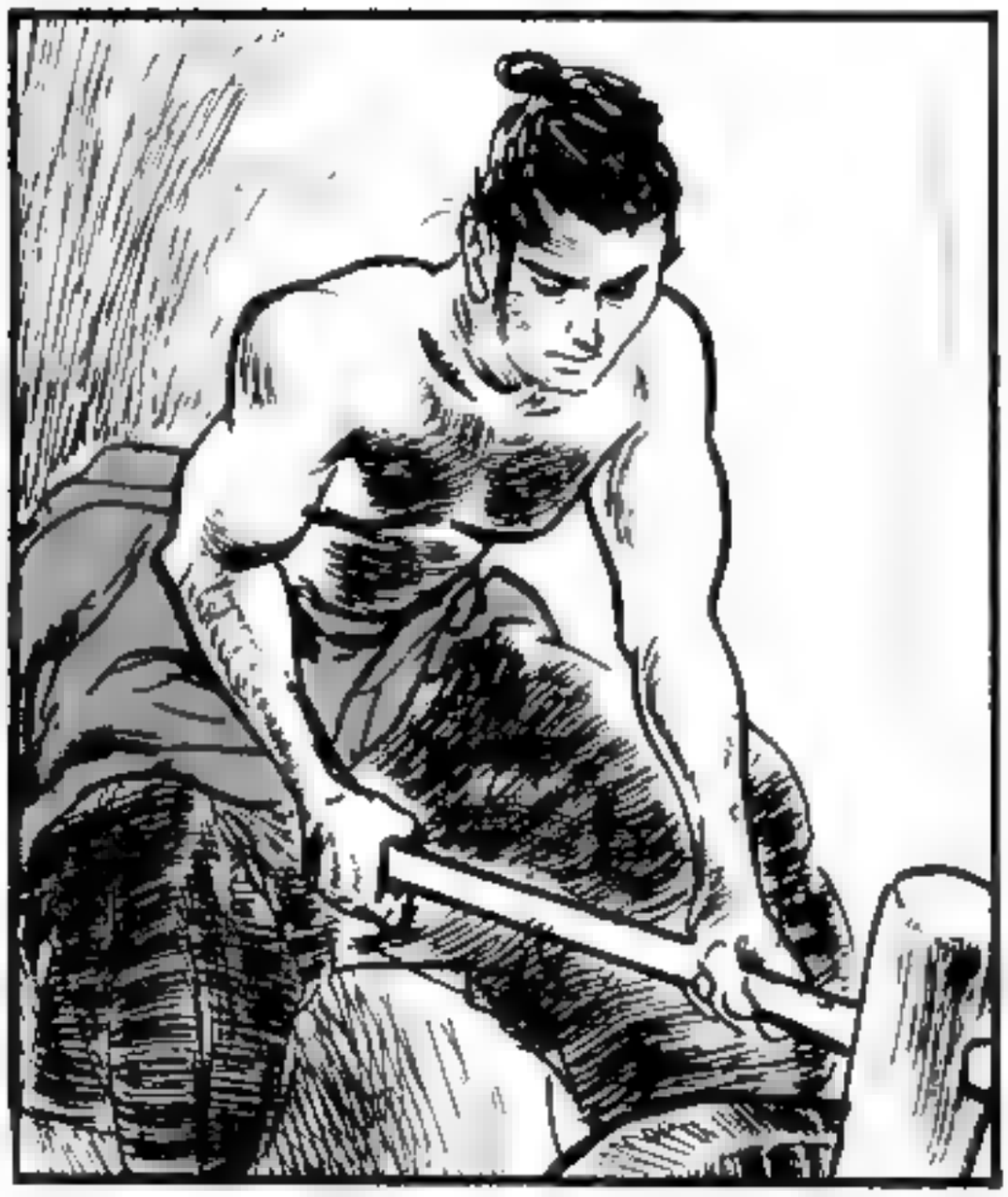
IT'S A LOT LIKE CUTTING WITH A SWORD. SURELY AN EXPERT AT DECAPITATION LIKE YOU, YAMADA-*DONO*, WOULD BE QUITE GOOD AT IT.

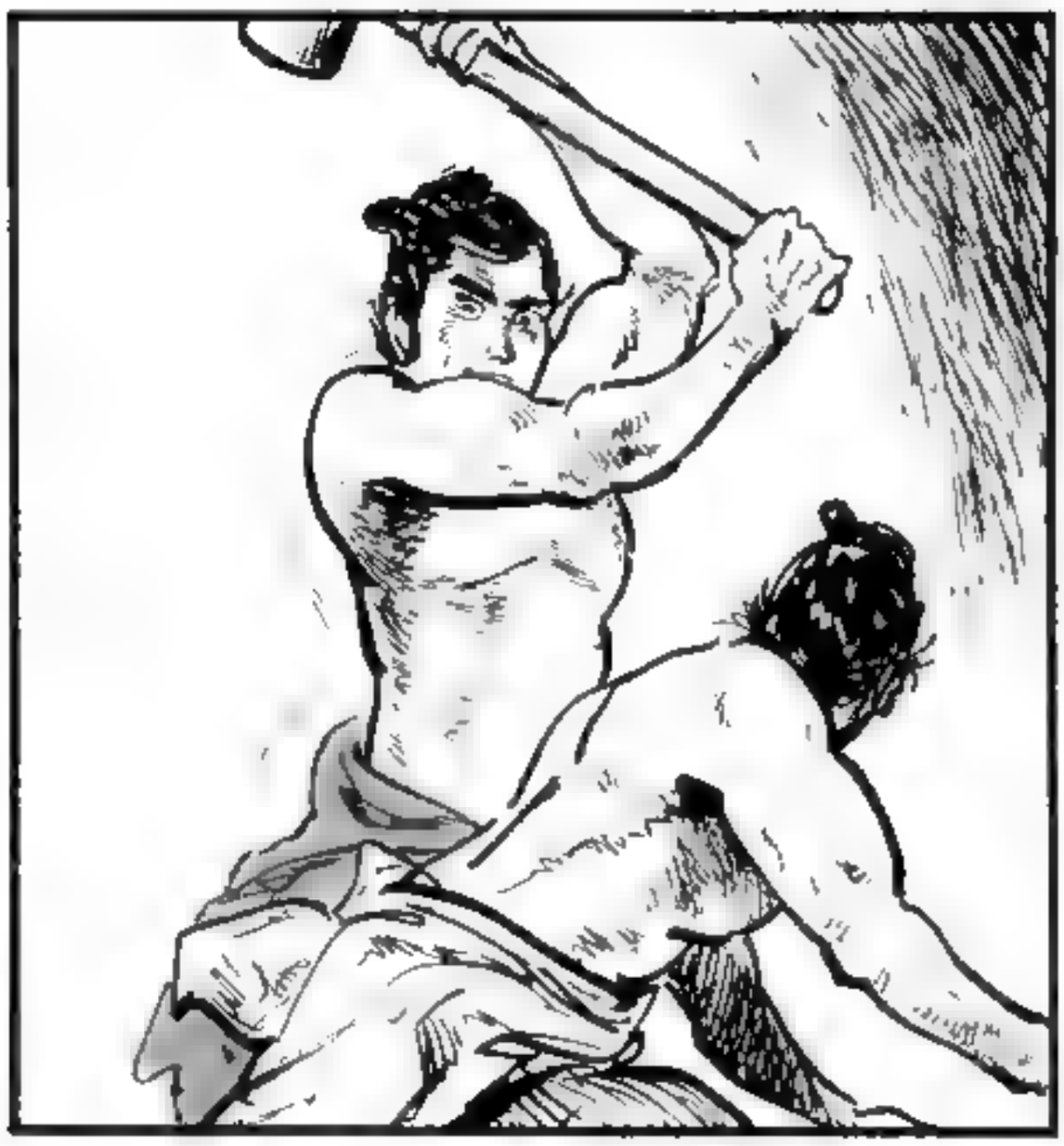
SO GIVE IT A TRY.

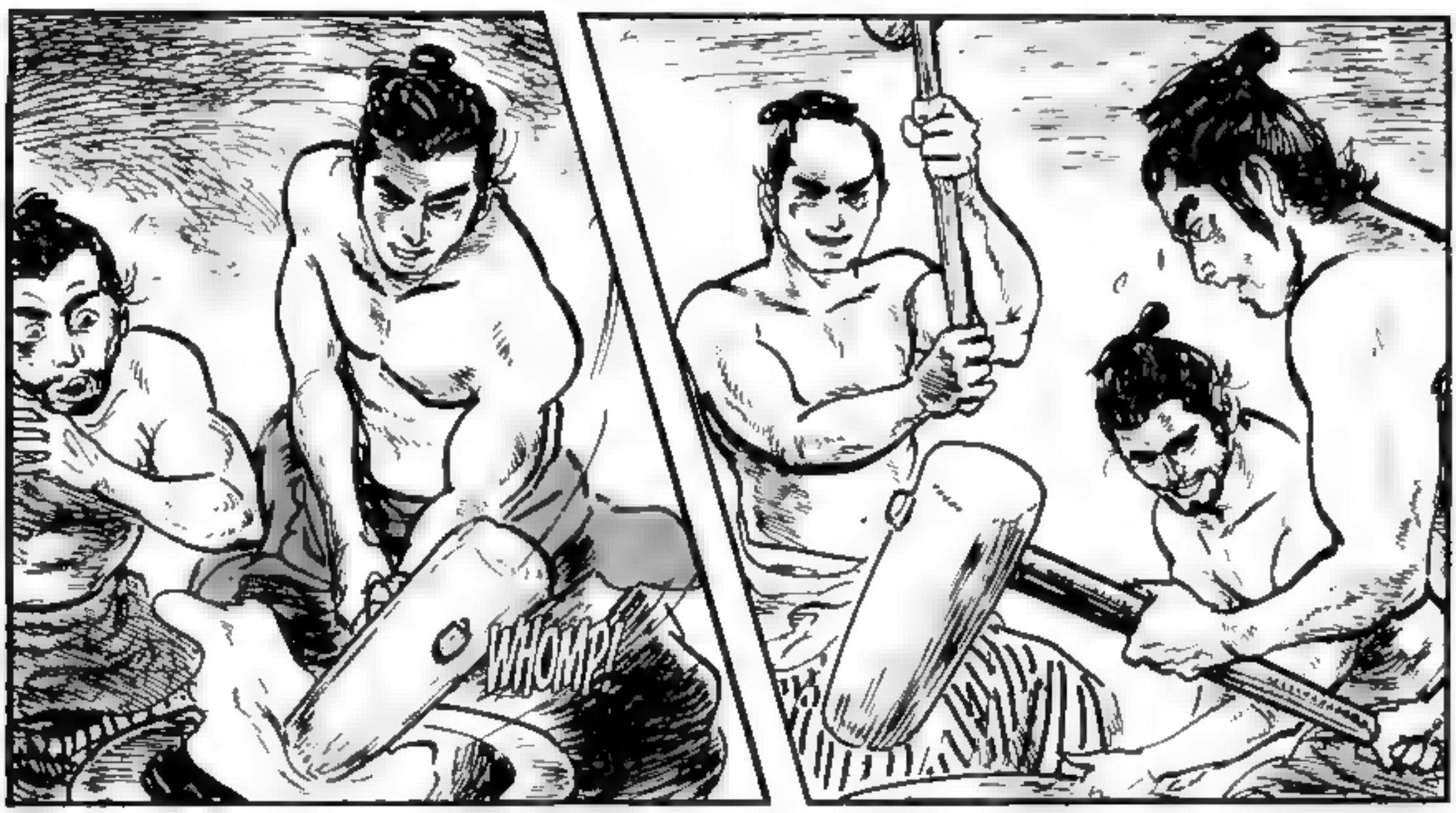
IF YOU WISH...


HERE GOES!
HURGH!
PLOP

ASAEMON SHOULD HAVE TURNED THEM DOWN, BUT...
HAVING FULLY UNDERSTOOD THEIR PLIGHT, HE WAS DRIVEN TO TAKE UP THE HAMMER BY THESE WORDS: "SURELY AN EXPERT AT DECAPITATION LIKE YOU..."






WHOMP!

THIS WAS THE FIRST TIME THAT ASAEMON HAD EVER POUNDED *MOCHI*. IT WAS A JOYOUS EXPERIENCE FOR HIM. AS AN EXECUTIONER OF CRIMINALS, ASAEMON HAD ALWAYS AVOIDED SUCH THINGS EVER SINCE HE WAS A CHILD.

HE WASN'T BEING STOIC. HE WAS TESTING HIMSELF.

THUNK

BUT THEIR WORDS DIDN'T PUT HIM UNDER ANY PRESSURE.

THUD

THAT WAS WHY HE ACCEPTED THEIR GOOD WILL.

HE WAS *HAPPY* TO POUND *MOCHI*. IT WAS A NEW EXPERIENCE FOR HIM.

PLOP

SO HOW DOES IT TASTE, YAMADA-*DONO*?
MOCHI YOU *MADE YOURSELF* SURE IS DIFFERENT, ISN'T IT?
IT'S *SO* MUCH MORE DELICIOUS.

PEOPLE OFTEN SAY MOCHI IS HARD TO DIGEST. ALTHOUGH IT'S PACKED WITH QUALITY, IT DOESN'T LOOK THAT WAY, SO PEOPLE END UP EATING TOO MUCH OF IT.
BUT IF YOU EAT JUST THE *RIGHT* AMOUNT, IT'S THE *PERFECT* FOOD FOR SAMURAI.

SINCE IT'S POUNDED RICE, IT'S *EASIER* TO DIGEST THAN NORMAL RICE, AND IT'S ALSO HANDY TO CARRY AROUND.
RIGHT...

BURP!

I ATE TOO MUCH WHILE I WAS TALKING!

HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA!

HEY, YOU KNOW WHAT?

WHILE YAMADA-*DONO*'S STILL HERE, WHY DON'T WE SHOW HIM OUR *SUEMONO-GIRI*?

LET'S WORK OFF OUR FOOD.

WHY DON'T YOU TRY TO CUT THIS *MOCHI*?

FINE!

BUT IT'S GOING TO BE *HARD*.

WELL, I THINK I CAN DO IT!

ALL RIGHT, THEN!

YAAH!

DAMN...

THUD!

YAAH!

THUD!

BWAHAHAHAHA!

HEY, KASHIWAGI, *YOU* DO IT!

IF YOU CAN'T, I'LL LAUGH AT *YOU!*

HERE GOES. WATCH ME!

IT'S *EASY* IF YOU USE YOUR HEAD.

THUD!

HA HA HA

HA HA HA

SHIT!

YAMADA-*DONO*, THE *MOCHI*'S TOO STICKY.

LET ME TRY.

GO RIGHT AHEAD.

MMPH!

E- EXCELLENT!

OF COURSE HE COULD DO IT...

BUT *HOW?*

IF YOU INTEND TO CUT THE *MOCHI*, YOU *WON'T* CUT IT. BUT IF YOU INTEND TO CUT THE PLATFORM *BENEATH* IT, YOU *WILL.*

DURING *SUEMONO-GIRI*, YOUR SWORD SLOWS DOWN AS IT DESCENDS. AND WHEN YOU UNCONSCIOUSLY TRY *NOT* TO CUT THE PLATFORM, YOU'RE AT A REAL DISADVANTAGE.

HMMM...

TOO TRUE.

WE'RE *IMPRESSED* BY YOUR *AMAZING* SKILLS.

YAMADA-*DONO*, THERE MUST BE *NOTHING* YOU CAN'T CUT.

WITH JUST *ONE* EXCEPTION...

AND WHAT WOULD *THAT* BE?

SOMETHING HE *COULD* CUT-- BUT ISN'T *WORTHY* OF CUTTING.

THE HEADS OF US *SAMURAI.*

YAMADA-*DONO*, NO MATTER HOW GOOD YOU ARE AT *SUEMONO-GIRI*, YOU CAN'T CUT *OUR* HEADS OFF. NOT EVEN IF YOU TEST SWORDS FOR THE *SHOGUN*.

NOT EVEN IF WE'RE TO BE *EXECUTED* FOR A *CRIME*!

IT'S BECAUSE YOU'RE A *RONIN*.

I HOPE I HAVEN'T UPSET YOU, BUT THAT'S THE *TRUTH*.

DON'T WORRY.

THAT'S JUST THE WAY IT IS.

YAMADA ASAEMON...
THE RUMORS DON'T DO HIM JUSTICE...

"SOMETHING HE *COULD* CUT—BUT ISN'T *WORTHY* OF CUTTING—THE HEADS OF US *SAMURAI*."

AOKI YAJIRO'S WORDS WERE ABSOLUTELY CORRECT. EVEN THOUGH ASAEMON TESTED SWORDS FOR THE SHOGUN, HE COULD NOT EXECUTE A SAMURAI.

AS A *RONIN*, HE COULD ONLY BEHEAD COMMONERS. HE WAS NOT FIT TO BEHEAD A SAMURAI.

THAT DIDN'T ESPECIALLY BOTHER HIM, BUT NOW HE UNDERSTOOD...

...THE REASON WHY AOKI TOLD HIM THAT.

A *JIKISAN HATAMOTO* HAD BEEN EXECUTED...

...ON THE DAY OF FASTING FOR ANCESTORS—THE DAY BEFORE THE SHOGUN'S PILGRIMAGE TO THE TWO MOUNTAINS OF UENO AND SHIBA FOR THE TURNING OF THE LEAVES.

MOREOVER, THE EVENT WOULD TAKE PLACE AFTER THE SEVENTH HOUR TO AVOID THE DAY OF PURITY. A DAY WAS CHOSEN WHICH WOULD NOT INTERFERE WITH THE ACTIVITIES OF THE SHOGUN. THE CHIEF INSPECTOR, A DEPUTY INSPECTOR, AND THE CITY COMMISSIONER WENT TO THE COUNCIL OF STATE AT TATSUNOKUCHI TO CALL UPON THE CONDEMNED AND DRESS HIM PROPERLY.

THE CITY COMMISSIONER READ THE CHARGES.

THEN THE DEPUTY INSPECTOR TOOK HIM AWAY.

PALACE GUARD INSPECTORS, INSPECTOR SERGEANTS, POLICE LIEUTENANTS, AND PRISON CONSTABLES ACCOMPANIED HIM RUNNING THROUGH THE STREETS TOWARD EITHER THE SHINAGAWA OR THE SENJŪ EXECUTION GROUNDS.

THEY DIDN'T CARE IF THEY CUT IN FRONT OF A *DAIMYŌ'S* PROCESSION.

THAT WAS WHY THE *DAIMYŌ* HAD BEEN NOTIFIED THE DAY BEFORE.

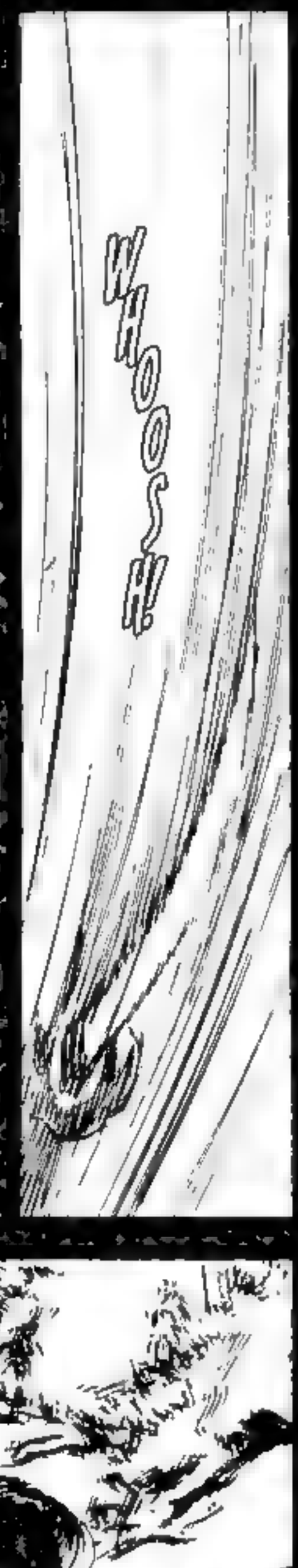
THUMP

THUMP

THUMP

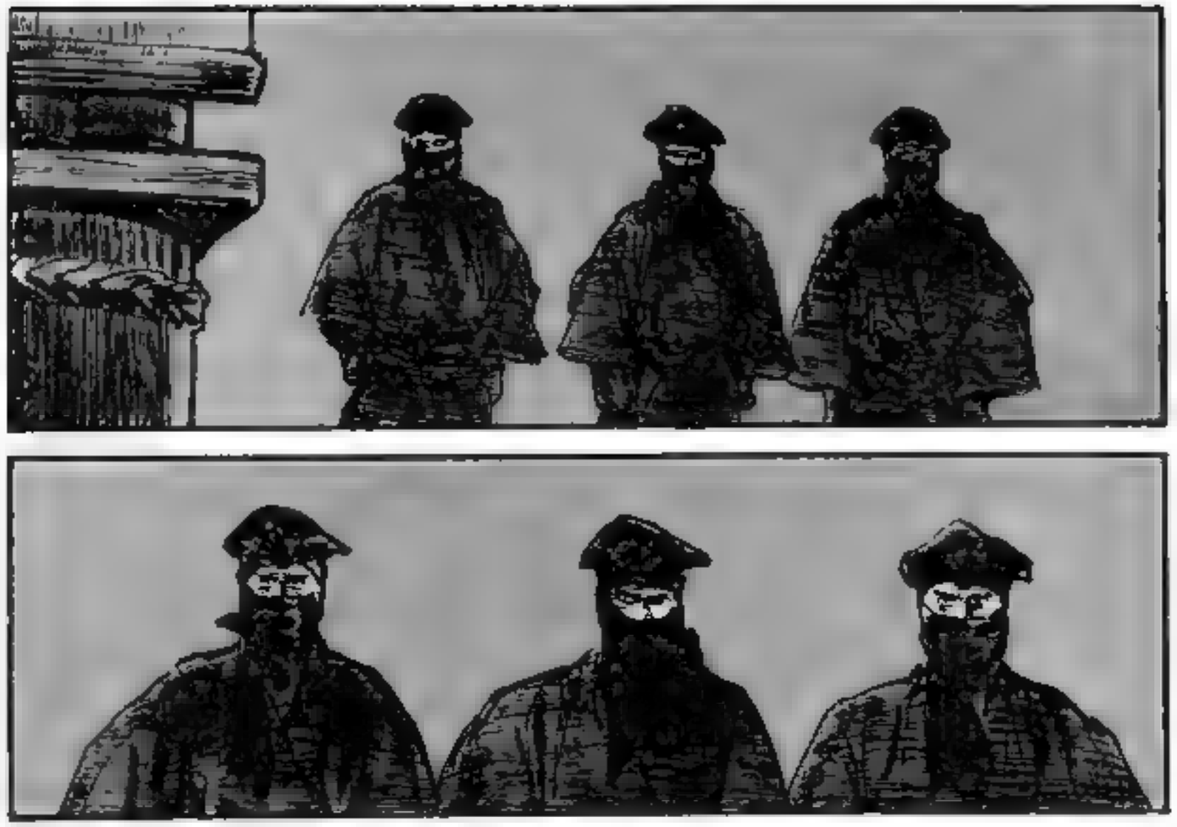
UPON ARRIVAL, A POLICE LIEUTENANT READ THE CHARGES AGAIN AND ASSUMED THE ROLE OF EXECUTIONER.

SUCH A DEATH SENTENCE MEANT THAT HIS FAMILY NAME WOULD BE WIPED OUT AND HIS HOUSE AND STIPEND WOULD BE CONFISCATED. IF HIS HEIR WERE HIS BIOLOGICAL CHILD, THEN HE WOULD BE EXILED TO A DISTANT ISLAND ALONG WITH HIS ANCESTRAL TABLETS AND HIS FAMILY WOULD BE FOREVER LEFT IN THE CARE OF RELATIVES.



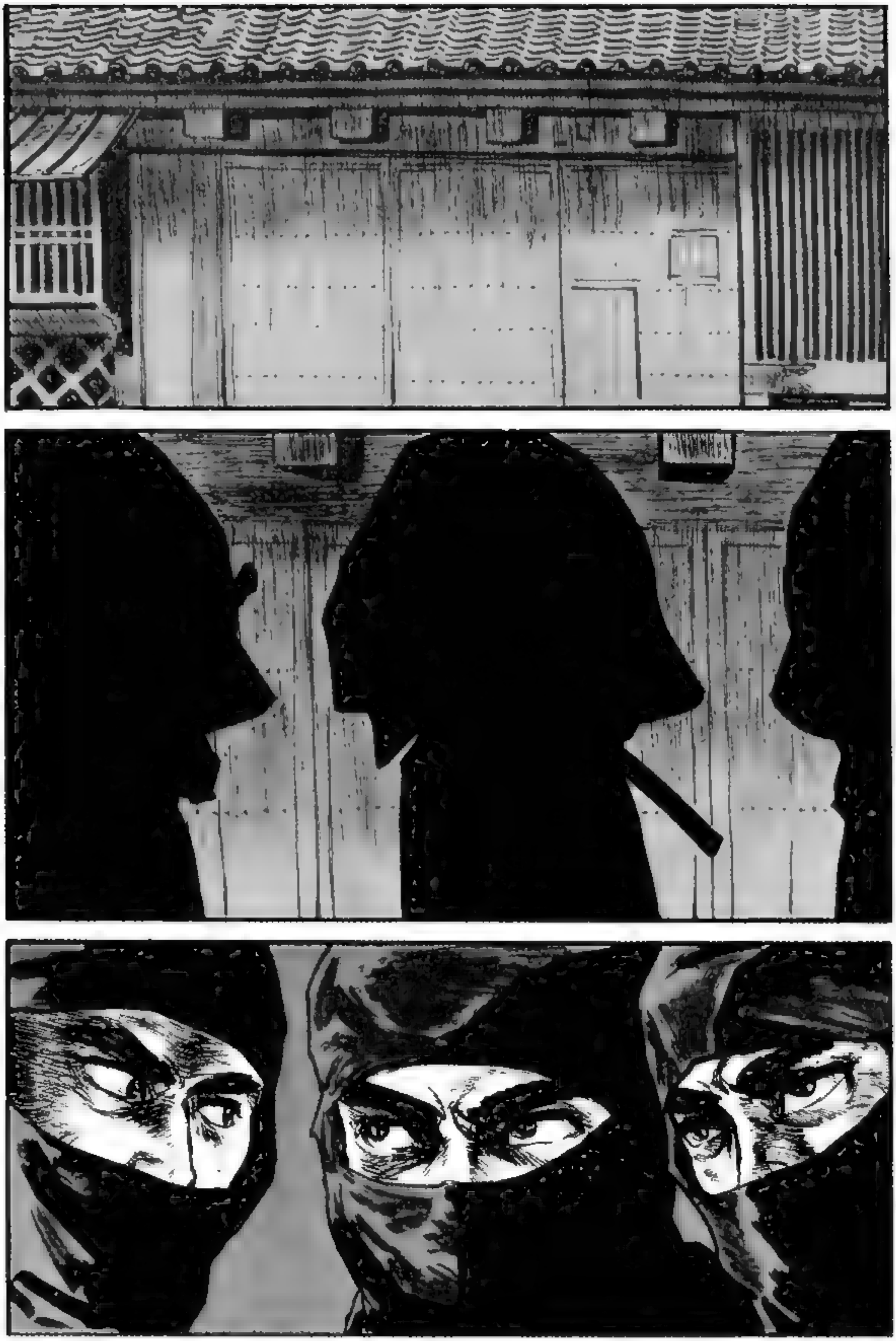
FWOOP

ISEYA,
ASAKUSA
KURAMAE



ISEYA SHIROZAEMON WAS A MAJOR RICE MERCHANT WITH THREE LARGE LOCATIONS AND OVER A THOUSAND EMPLOYEES DOING TWO THOUSAND *RYO* OF BUSINESS A DAY.

TWO THOUSAND *RYO* WERE EQUIVALENT TO FIVE THOUSAND BAGS OF RICE. FOUR OF ISEYA'S CLERKS RECEIVED TWO HUNDRED *RYO* A YEAR--THE EQUIVALENT OF A THOUSAND *KOKU* OF RICE FOR A SAMURAI.



BANG BANG BANG

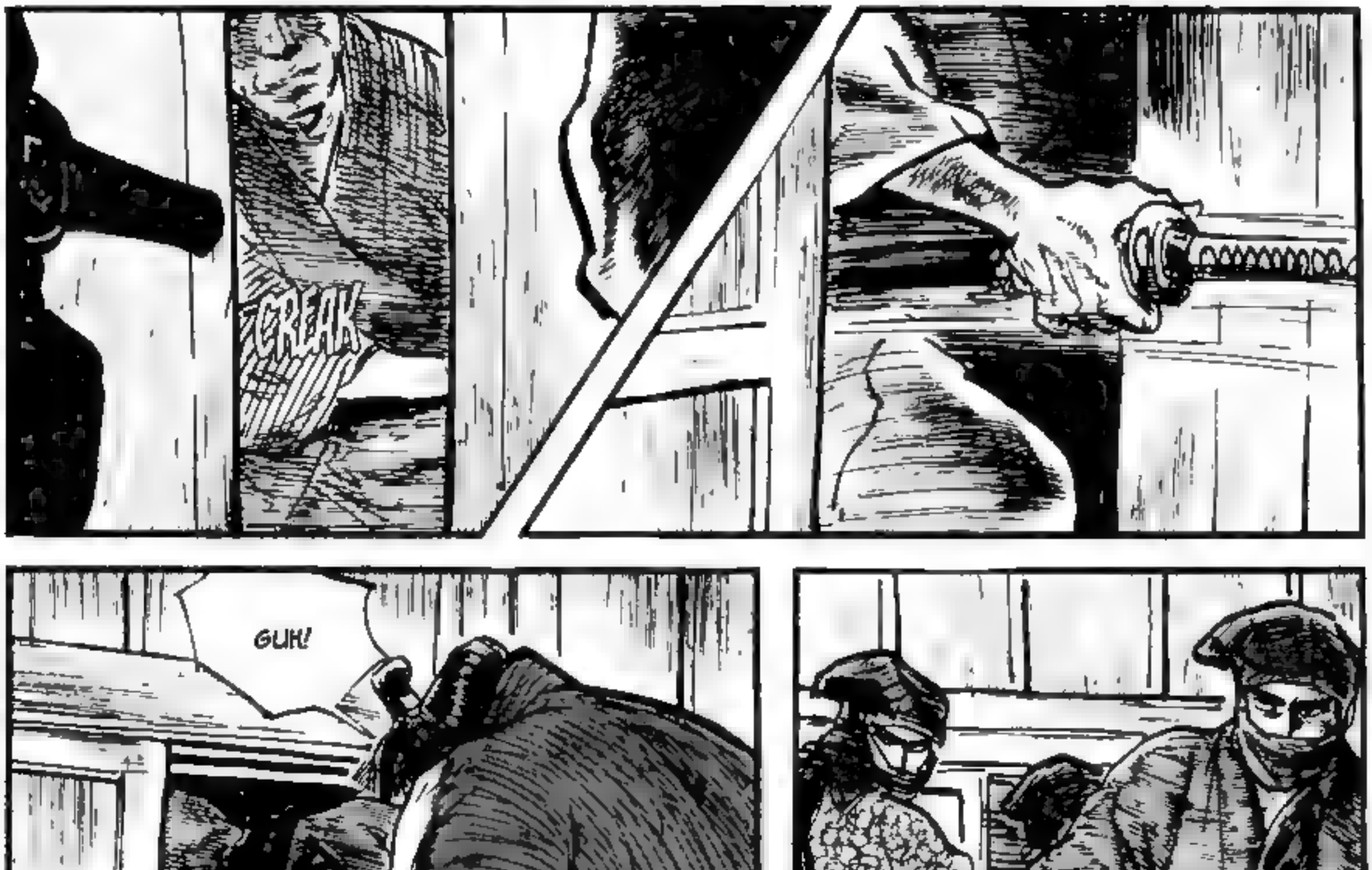
WHO IS IT?

WE'RE THE POLICE. WE WOULD LIKE TO ASK ABOUT THE *RONIN* STAYING WITH YOU. IT'S URGENT.

YOU...

THERE WERE OVER TEN *RONIN* SERVING AS BODYGUARDS FOR ISEYA. THEY WERE ALL COMPETENT, SO NO BURGLARS WOULD EVER DARE TO BREAK IN. BUT THIS TIME, A CLERK OPENED THE DOOR WITHOUT ANY SUSPICION. HE WAS A TOWNSMAN WHO WAS OVERLY CONFIDENT AND FULL OF HIMSELF.

CLICK CLACK


CREAK
GUH!

WAAAH!
AAAH!

B-BURGLARS!
STOMP STOMP STOMP
HOH!

AAAH!

DSHKKK!

GAAAH!

GEH!

GYAAAH!

KAAAH!
CLANG!
SHHHT!

GWEHHH!

URGH!

PSHHH!

CLANG!

DBHH!!

GWAAAH!

URGH!

GWWWAH!

EEEH!

THUD
AAAH...
Y-YOU WANT MONEY? T-TAKE WHATEVER YOU WANT!

SO YOU'RE ISEYA SHIRO-ZAEMON.

UHHH...

ANSWER ME!

Y-YES...

THEN DIE!

DASHH!

EEK!

FLOP

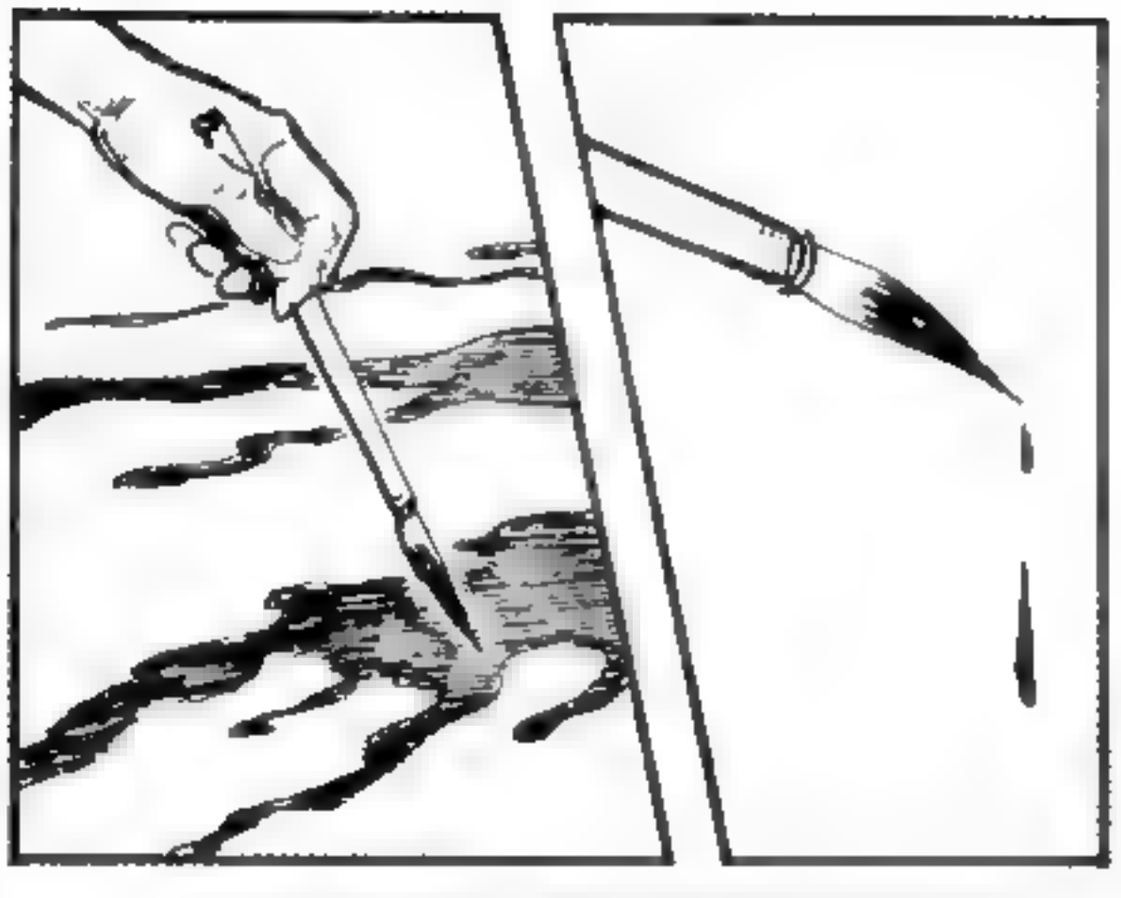
HMPH!

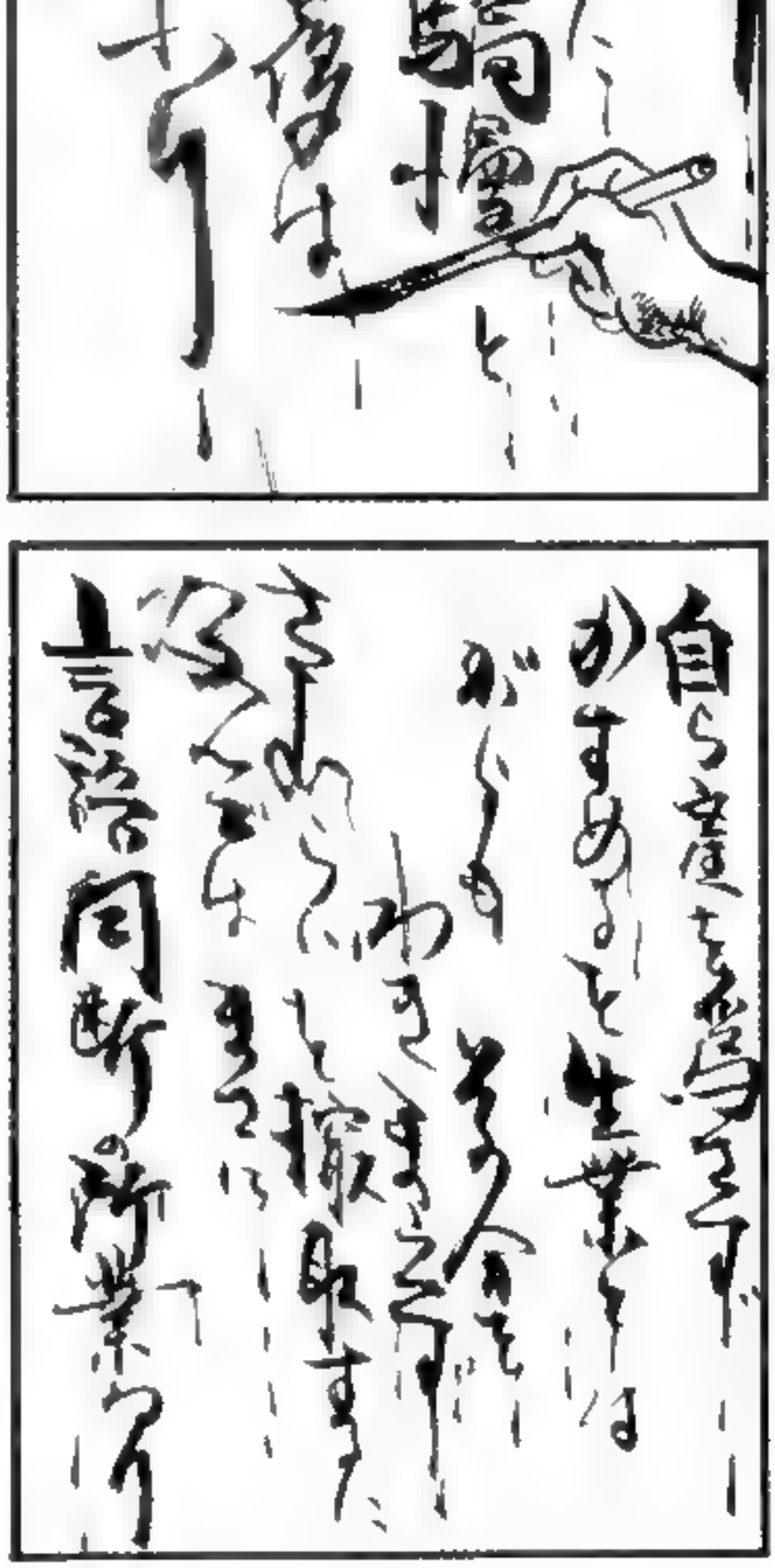
NO!

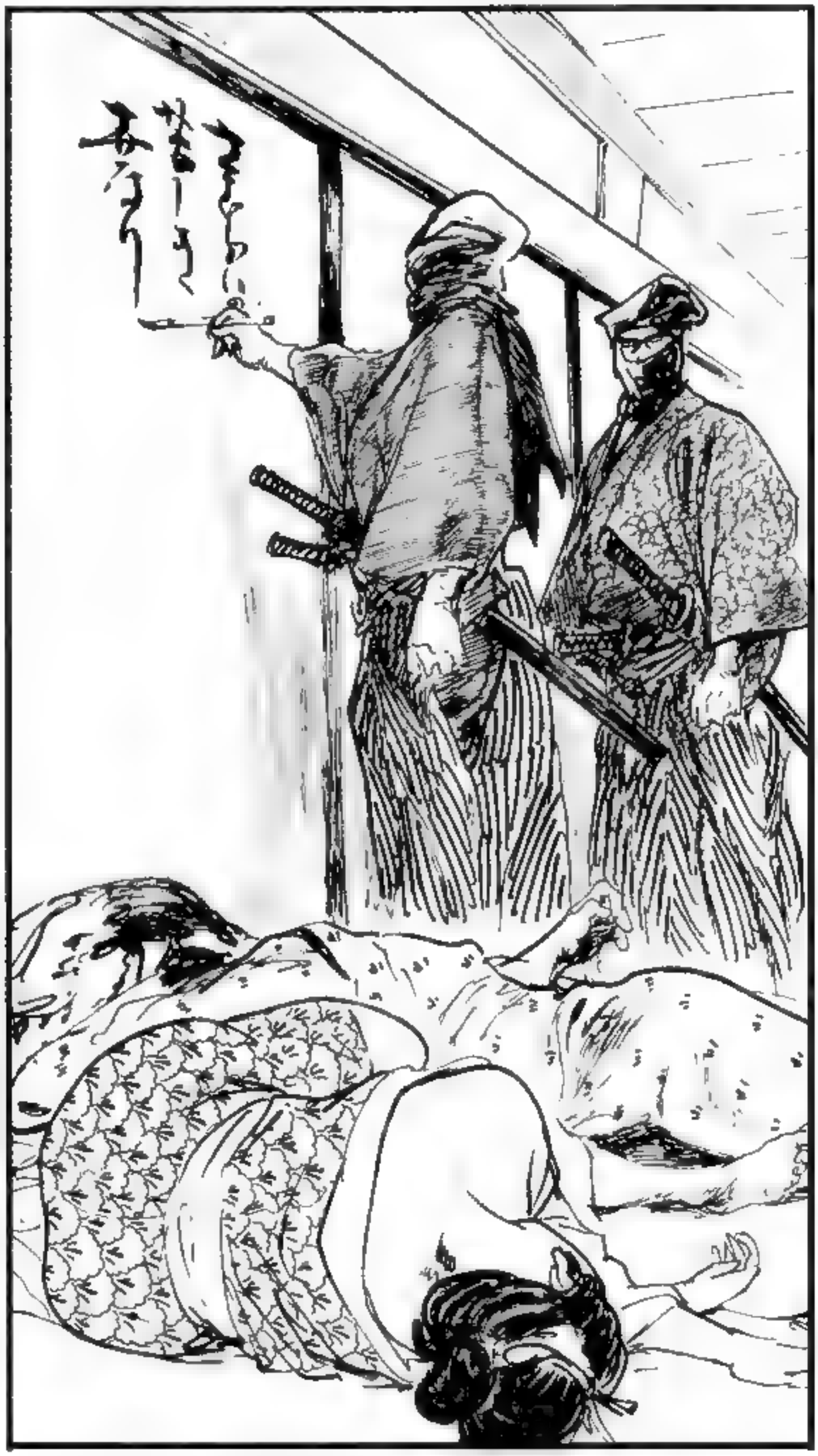
BUT IF PEOPLE KNOW WHAT YOU LOOK LIKE WHEN THEY'RE HUNTING US DOWN, IT'LL BE HARDER FOR US TO KILL THE OTHER TWO RICE DEALERS.

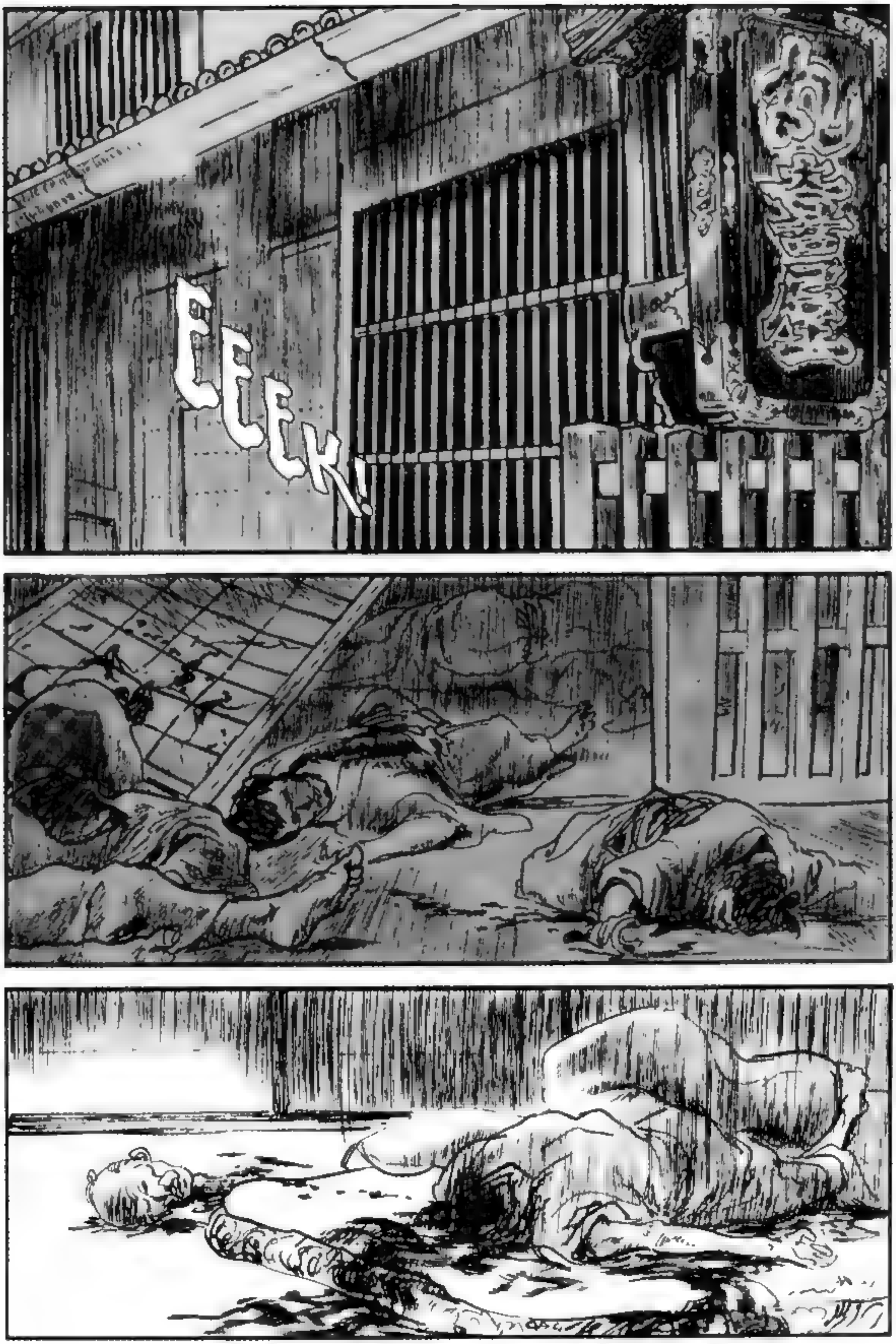
WE DIDN'T COME TO KILL ANY *WOMEN*.

WE CAME TO SHOW WHAT *WARRIORS* ARE MADE OF.








EEK!

言語同断。商業なり
かかるさもしき
おかく政商の
癒着に
一、市長候

札差の搾取すると
一割五分も前代未聞の
高利をむさぼり
さらに奥の金となる
右目をつぶして
失明に追い込んだ
悪業なり

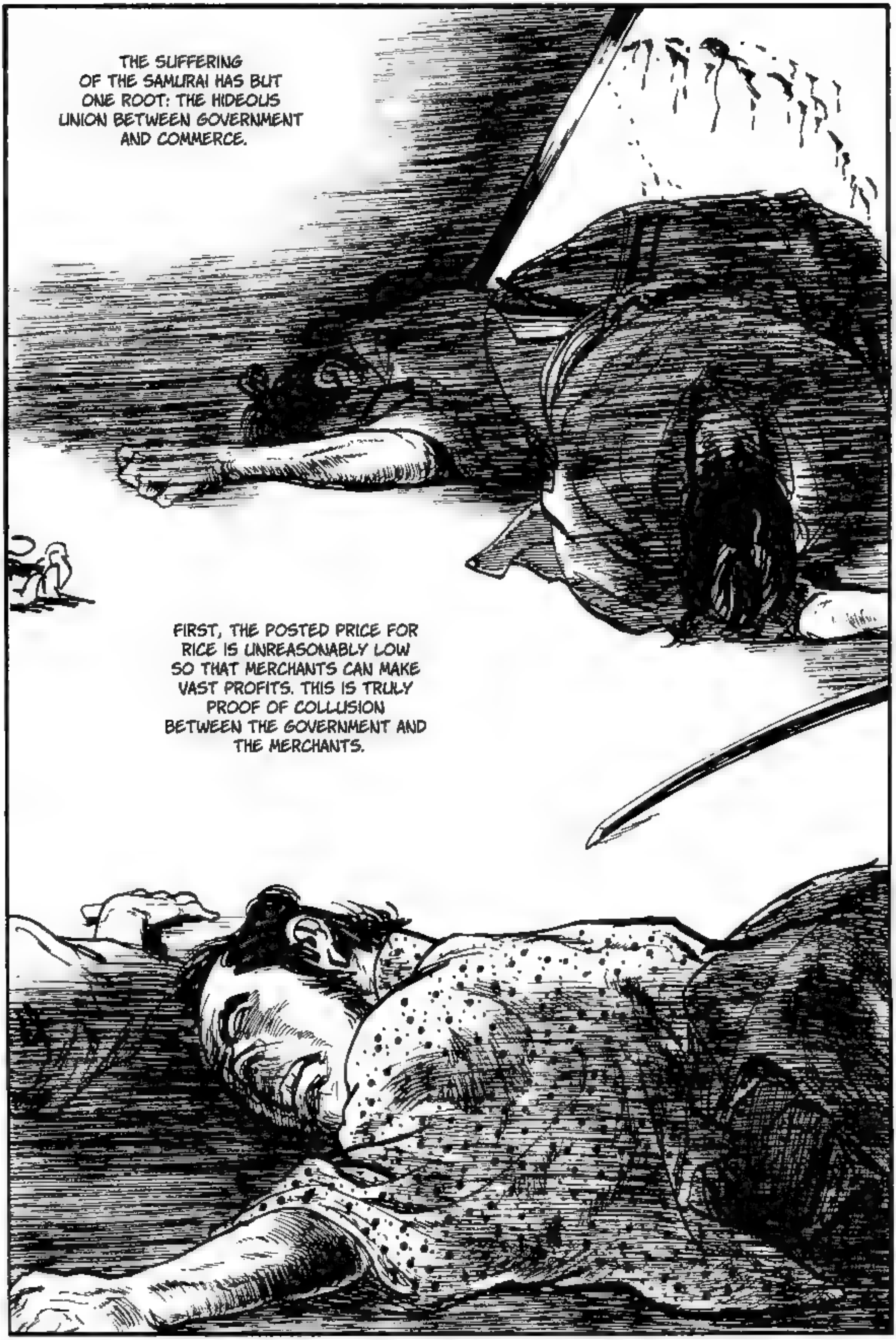
一、悪徳紙価格の不当に
低下して口あれば
乳差に巨利を得るが
鳥のごとく政商
結託の証左なり
一、奥印金百
何ぞや

一、さらに
追徴米
百姓をいじめ
それ何の為ぞ
これなおざる

一、市政道
大商人の裏取引を
成せたる白みをもって
糾すべし
嗚呼
苦しむらいの

三之組

AND SO HE WROTE IN BLOOD:
THIS IS THE BITTER WORLD OF THE SAMURAI. THE ARROGANCE AND EXTRAVAGANCE OF THE MERCHANT CLASS IS INTOLERABLE. THEY MAKE A LIVING THROUGH UNPRODUCTIVE THIEVERY. MOREOVER, IGNORANT OF THEIR PROPER PLACE, THEY EXPLOIT THEIR SAMURAI SUPERIORS. THAT IS TRULY UNSPEAKABLE.


THE SUFFERING OF THE SAMURAI HAS BUT ONE ROOT: THE HIDEOUS UNION BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND COMMERCE.
FIRST, THE POSTED PRICE FOR RICE IS UNREASONABLY LOW SO THAT MERCHANTS CAN MAKE VAST PROFITS. THIS IS TRULY PROOF OF COLLUSION BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND THE MERCHANTS.

SECOND, WHAT IS WITH THIS "SEAL MONEY"? AS IF THE UNPRECEDENTED FIFTEEN PERCENT THE RICE MERCHANTS SQUEEZE OUT OF US WEREN'T ENOUGH, THEY USE SEAL MONEY AS AN EXCUSE TO GET EVEN MORE OUT OF US. SUCH EVIL IS INTOLERABLE.

THIRD, THEY RIP OFF THE FARMERS WITH "SURCHARGE RICE."

WE WILL RECTIFY THE SHADY DEALINGS OF OFFICIALS AND MERCHANTS WITH THE WHITE BLADES OF WARRIORS.

ALAS, THIS IS THE BITTER WORLD OF THE SAMURAI. - THE TRIO

御用

御用

御用

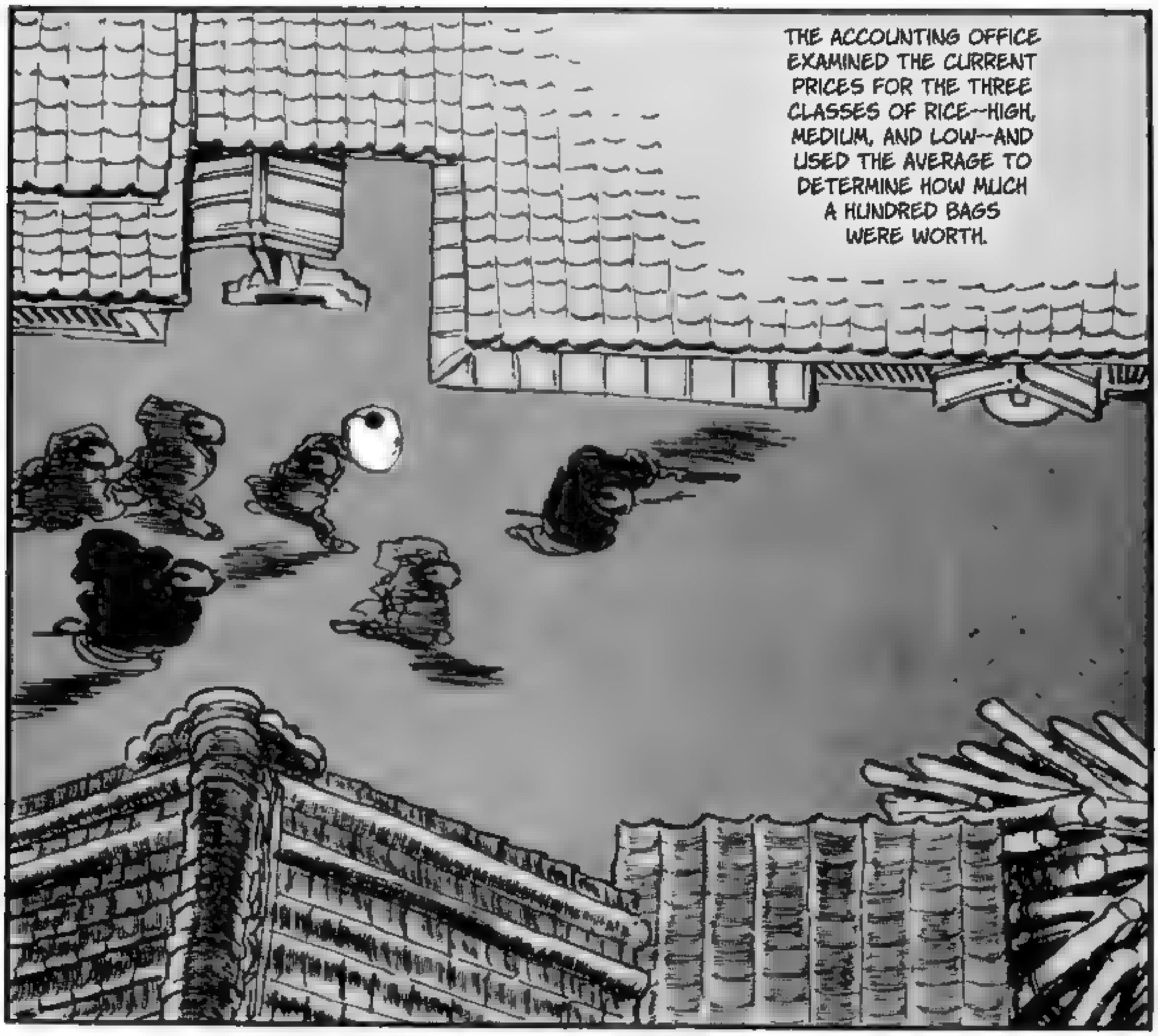
御用

御用

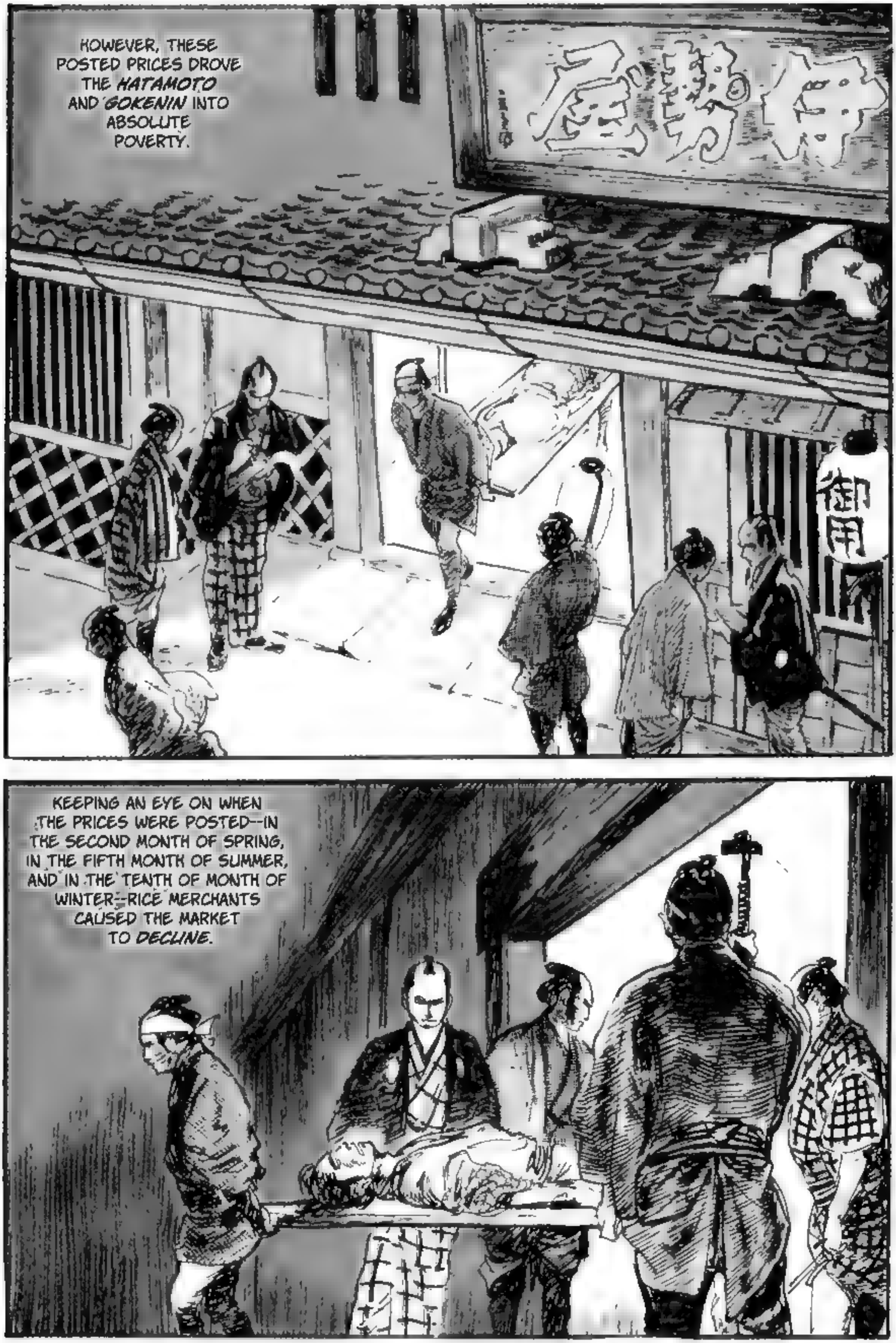
THE GOVERNMENT PAID *GOKENIN* WITH UNPOLISHED RICE. THE "*POSTED PRICE*" DETERMINED THE EXCHANGE RATE FOR CONVERTING RICE INTO CASH.

御用

御用


THE ACCOUNTING OFFICE EXAMINED THE CURRENT PRICES FOR THE THREE CLASSES OF RICE--HIGH, MEDIUM, AND LOW--AND USED THE AVERAGE TO DETERMINE HOW MUCH A HUNDRED BAGS WERE WORTH.

THE PRICES WERE DISPLAYED AT THE NAKA NO KUCHI GATEWAY TO THE GOSHOIN GATES AND THE THREE-TIERED TOWER OF EDO CASTLE.


HOWEVER, THESE POSTED PRICES DROVE THE *HATAMOTO* AND *GOKENIN* INTO ABSOLUTE POVERTY.
御用
KEEPING AN EYE ON WHEN THE PRICES WERE POSTED--IN THE SECOND MONTH OF SPRING, IN THE FIFTH MONTH OF SUMMER, AND IN THE TENTH OF MONTH OF WINTER--RICE MERCHANTS CAUSED THE MARKET TO *DECLINE*.

WHEN THE MARKET FELL, BRINGING DOWN THE POSTED PRICES, THE MERCHANTS WOULD SELL RICE CHEAPLY.
LATER, THEY WOULD *RAISE* THEIR PRICES. THIS MANIPULATION OF PRICES WAS A COMMON STRATEGY TO MAXIMIZE PROFITS.

MOREOVER, LARGE GOVERNMENT DONATIONS ENABLED THE POSTED PRICES TO BE TWENTY TO THIRTY PERCENT *LESS* THAN THEIR MARKET VALUE.

"THIS IS THE BITTER WORLD OF THE SAMURAI..."

OUR FELLOW *GOKENIN*...

IT'S GOING TO BE HARD TO FIND *THESE* CULPRITS.

THE IMPOVERISHED *HATAMOTO* AND *GOKENIN* HAD TO BORROW HUGE SUMS OF MONEY FROM THE RICE MERCHANTS AT A FIXED INTEREST RATE OF FIFTEEN PERCENT.

HOWEVER, THE UNRELENTING RICE MERCHANTS EXPLOITED THEM EVEN FURTHER BY USING "*SEAL MONEY*" AS A PRETEXT TO RAISE THE INTEREST RATE.

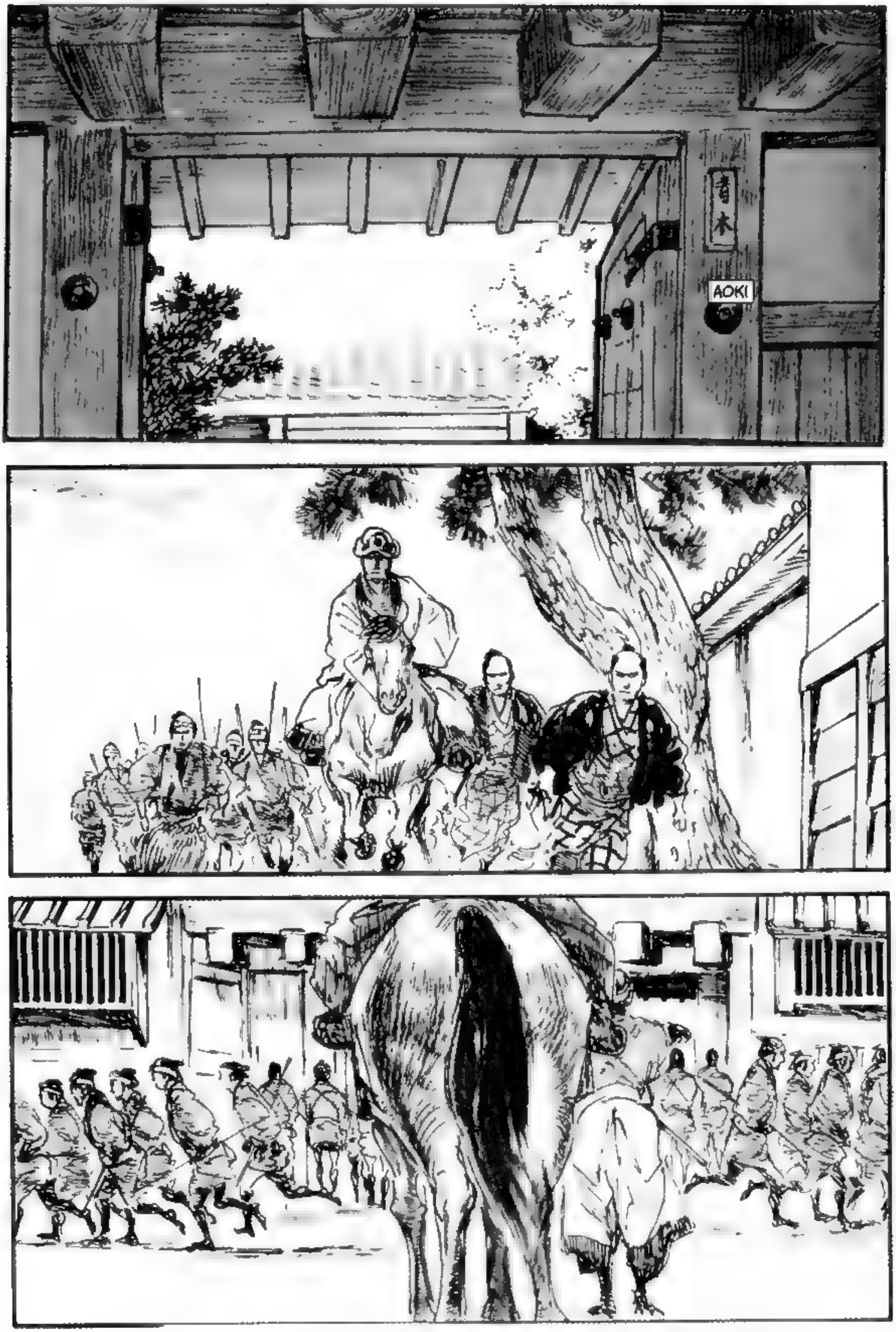
THE RICE MERCHANTS BORROWED THEIR OWN MONEY FROM OTHERS. THEY WERE LIKE DECEPTIVE SUBLESSORS. WHEN THEY RECEIVED RICE, THEY TOOK SEAL MONEY AS PROOF OF PAYMENT.

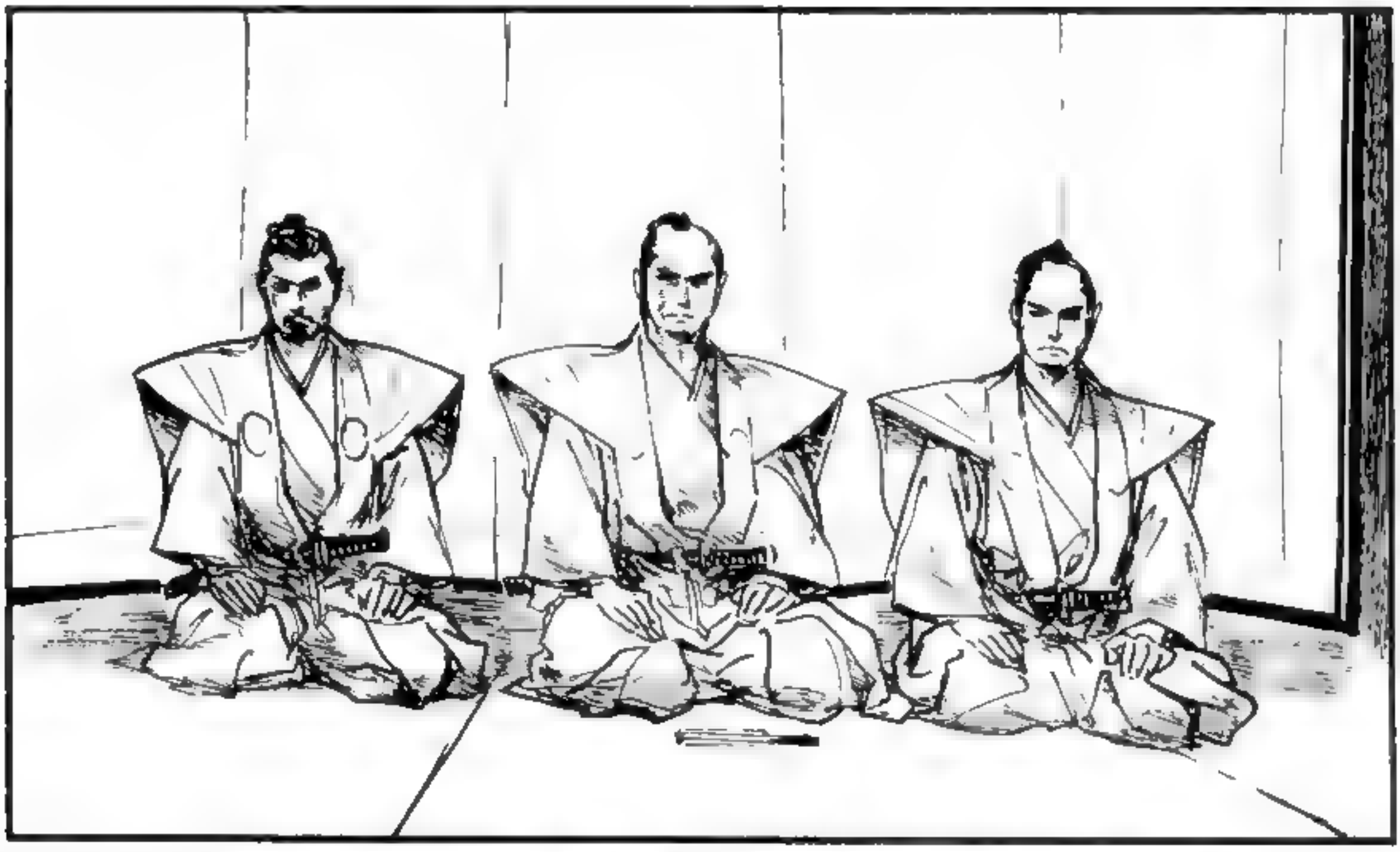
MOREOVER, THEY DEMANDED THIS FEE FOR *EVERY* TRANSACTION. EVEN THOUGH THE INTEREST ON LOANS WAS SET AT FIFTEEN PERCENT, A TWENTY PERCENT FEE EVERY THREE MONTHS ADDED UP TO *EIGHTY* PERCENT PER YEAR.

SO IF ONE BORROWED A HUNDRED *RYO*, THE INTEREST AND SEAL MONEY WOULD ADD UP TO ANOTHER HUNDRED *RYO* IN A YEAR--A *MONSTROUS* PROFIT.

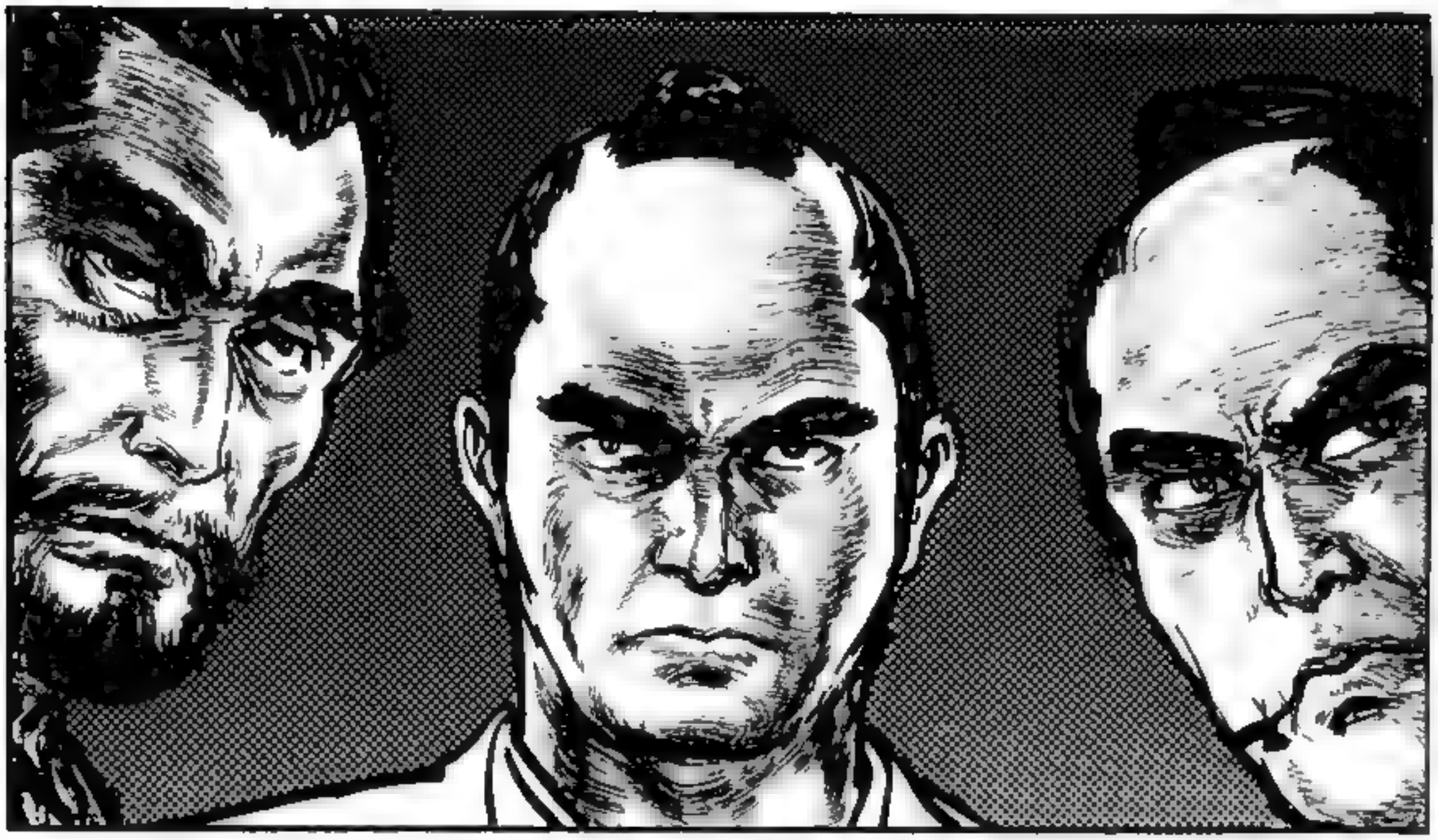
THE GOVERNMENT DID NOTHING TO STOP SUCH EXPLOITATION. TRULY...

...THIS IS THE BITTER WORLD OF THE SAMURAI.


青木
AOKI



THEY'VE COME FOR US.



COULD I HAVE THAT ONE?

YEAH

COULD YOU CUT IT OPEN FOR ME?

JUST A MOMENT...

AOKI YAJIRO? THAT *KOBUSHINBUMI JIKISAN* WITH SEVEN HUNDRED *KOKU*?

THERE WERE THREE OF 'EM, INCLUDING TWO OF HIS BUDDIES.

I HEARD ISEYA'S WIFE SAW AOKI'S FACE. THEY WERE IN A HURRY BECAUSE SHE KNEW WHO HE WAS.

ISN'T THAT *HORRIBLE?*

THEY ATTACKED *THREE* RICE MERCHANTS IN *ONE* NIGHT. THEY KILLED *NINETEEN* PEOPLE AND STOLE *SEVEN THOUSAND RYO.*

SO MUCH FOR THE GLORY OF THE *JIKISAN.*

WHEN WAS THIS?

LAST NIGHT.

HUH?

I WON'T NEED THAT. SORRY FOR THE TROUBLE.

北町奉行所

NORTHERN TOWN COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

SO...WHAT IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO AOKI YAJIRO AND HIS MEN?

THEY'RE THE FIRST FRIENDS I COULD EVER TRUST.

HMMM...

HAVING LISTENED TO YOU, I UNDERSTAND THE GIST OF WHAT HAS HAPPENED.

HOWEVER...

I *CANNOT* BELIEVE THAT *WOMEN* AND *CHILD LABORERS* WERE AMONG THE DEAD.

AND I WOULD LIKE TO ASK YOU ABOUT THE SEVEN THOUSAND *RYO*.

WAS IT *REALLY* STOLEN?

WELL...

DID THEY REALLY COMMIT *BURGLARY*?

THAT'S *ENOUGH!*

THEY'VE ALREADY *ADMITTED* THEIR CRIMES AND *SIGNED* A CONFESSION.

SO WILL THEY BE EXECUTED SOON?

YES!

I WOULD LIKE TO MAKE A REQUEST.

I WISH TO MEET THEM AT THE EXECUTION GROUNDS. PLEASE...

YOU *CANNOT* BE PRESENT AT THE EXECUTION OF *JIKISAN*. BEING THEIR FRIEND ISN'T A GOOD ENOUGH REASON.

AMONG THOSE WHO ARE WARRIORS-- *JIKISAN* OR *RONIN*-- SOME KNOW WHERE THEY WILL DIE AND SOME DON'T.

THEY KNOW WHERE THEY WILL DIE.

SO *WHY* WOULD THEY KILL INNOCENTS AND STEAL SO MUCH MONEY?

SO THEY COULD BE EXECUTED--FULFILLING THEIR WISH TO KNOW WHERE THEY WILL DIE AS WARRIORS. I WOULD LIKE TO SEE THEM WITH MY OWN EYES.

I TOO WOULD LIKE TO DIE AS A WARRIOR. COMMISSIONER, AS A WARRIOR, YOU SHOULD UNDERSTAND MY REQUEST.

HMMM..

IF I GIVE YOU AN ANSWER, THINGS WILL BECOME *VERY* DIFFICULT FOR ME SINCE THE GOVERNMENT IS INVOLVED.

...
...

AOKI AND HIS MEN WILL COMMIT *SEPPUKU*. I WILL ALLOW YOU TO BE IN ATTENDANCE.

SO...

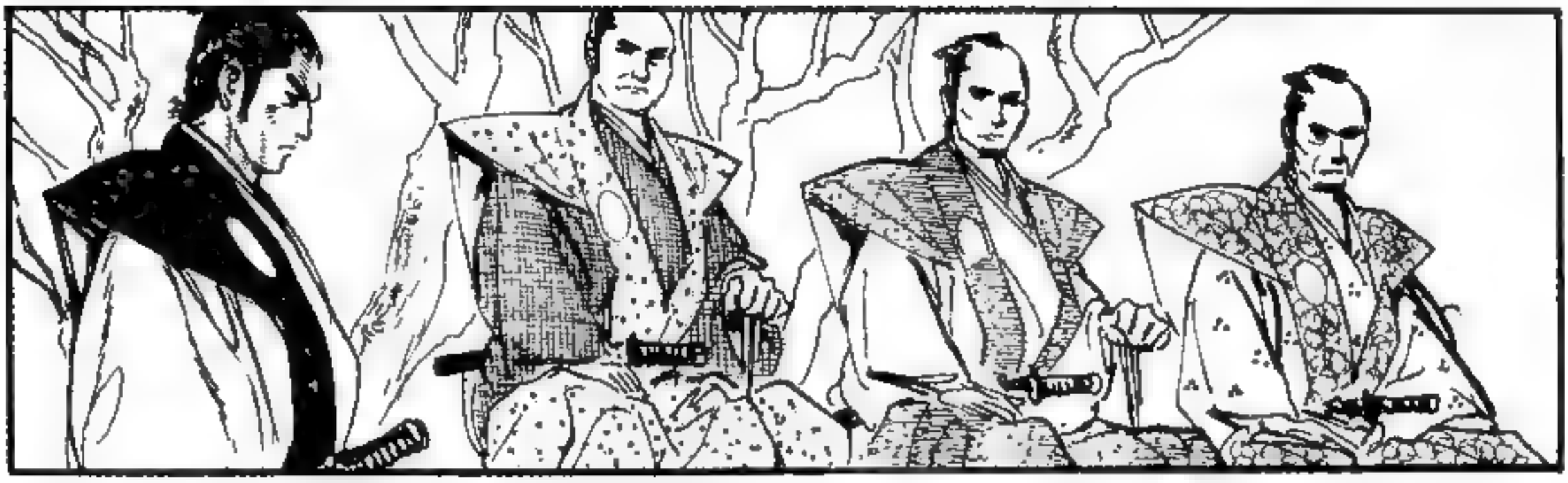
AS I SAID, THIS WILL BE DIFFICULT BECAUSE THE GOVERNMENT IS INVOLVED.

NOW THAT YOU'VE DRAGGED ME INTO THIS, I'M *STUCK*.

HAVING GIVEN YOU YOUR INSTRUCTIONS, I CAN BE FULLY HONEST WITH YOU. AOKI AND HIS MEN *ARE* TRUE WARRIORS WHO WANT TO KNOW WHERE THEY WILL DIE--JUST AS YOU SAID.

LOOK AT THIS.

さらしの生
しるように商人の騒擾いまの
事件4日に至
自ら筆をとり為さ
生業もしなかりし
みまうそで
さらいうも捨
まさに言語同
ぶる さもあの
かりて政と高
一、市強盗強殺の
つの顕れにして、
得ざるか為の
報酬の記
一、自の念な
札差の作
一刻



I HAVE A REQUEST.

WHAT IS IT?

THIS IS THE BITTER WORLD OF THE SAMURAI.

I WOULD *AT LEAST* LIKE TO LEAVE IT *HAPPILY*.

SO I WOULD LIKE TO KNOW WHETHER THIS SWORD...

...IS *DULL* OR *SHARP*. CAN SOMEONE TEST IT?

INDEED! LOOKING AROUND, THERE ARE *NO* DECENT SWORDS TO BE FOUND. THEY'RE *ALL* DULL. THAT'S WHY THE TOWNSPEOPLE BECOME ARROGANT--AND WHY THE *TRUE* SAMURAI ARE BITTER.

IF EVEN THE SWORDS FOR *SEPPUKU* ARE DULL, THAT'S *TOTALLY* UNACCEPTABLE. AND IT'LL BE BECAUSE *EVERYTHING* THE GOVERNMENT DOES IS LIKE A DULL SWORD.

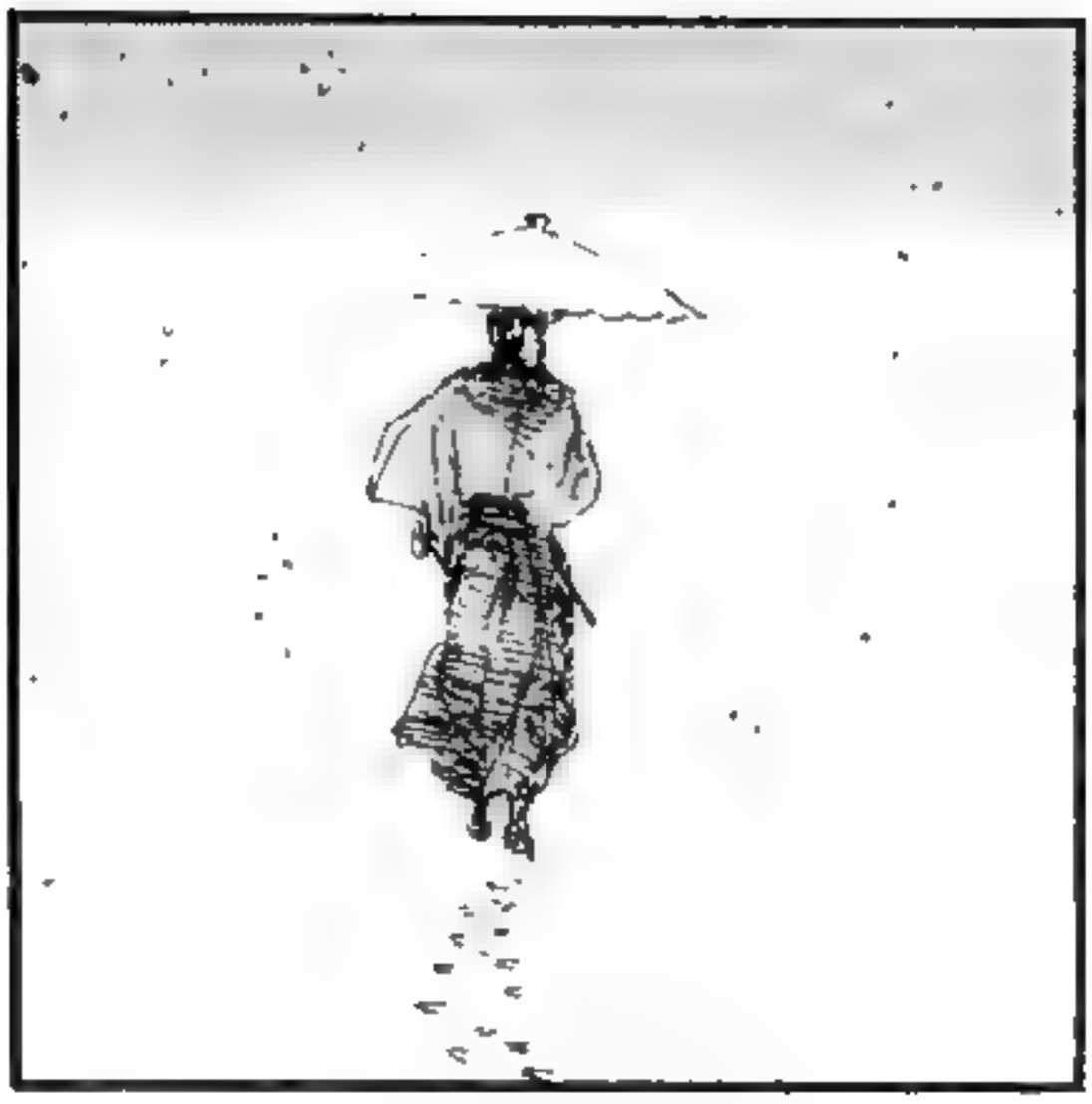
CAN THIS CUT OR NOT? CAN SOMEONE TEST IT?

I'LL TEST IT.

ZBHHH

YOU WANTED TO SEE HOW WELL IT WOULD CUT...

THANK YOU.



the thirteenth Portrait of Death

THESE ARE SOME TRULY *AMAZING* PICTURES, AREN'T THEY?

諸行無常
是生滅法
生滅滅已
寂滅為樂
THEY'RE THE *TALK OF THE TOWN.*

CONNOISSEURS ARE FIGHTING EACH OTHER TO BUY THEM.

PICTURES ARE SUPPOSED TO DEPICT THE *IMAGINARY*...

...OR TO STRIVE FOR *BEAUTY*. BUT I'VE NEVER SEEN ANY PICTURES THAT ARE THIS *REALISTIC*.

THE ARTIST DID THESE WITHOUT *EVER* HAVING SEEN AN EXECUTION. I'M *IMPRESSED*.

HER NAME IS *KAWAI JŌFŪ*. SHE BROUGHT HER WORK TO THE TOWN COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE. SHE BELIEVES THAT REALISM IS AN ARTIST'S FIRST PRIORITY. SO SHE'S UPSET THAT HER IMAGINARY WORKS HAVE BECOME SO POPULAR.

IF YOU WOULD PERMIT IT, SHE WOULD LIKE TO WATCH YOU PERFORM AN EXECUTION.

IF SHE SEES IT FOR HERSELF, THEN HER WORK WILL NOT BE DISRESPECTFUL. IT WON'T HAVE ANY EXAGGERATIONS OR FABRICATIONS.

SHE LEFT OUT YOUR FACE BECAUSE SHE DID NOT WANT TO OFFEND YOU.

SHE SAID SHE COULDN'T IMAGINE THE FACE OF SOMEONE SHE DIDN'T KNOW.

SO SHE'S EAGER TO MEET YOU.

SHE WANTS TO RECEIVE YOUR PERMISSION.

I *REFUSE.*

B-BUT THE TOWN COMISSIONER IS VERY EAGER TO...

IF SHE CAN PAINT *THIS* WELL FROM HER IMAGINATION, ALLOWING HER TO SEE THE REAL THING AND PAINT IT WOULD STRIKE FEAR IN THE HEARTS OF VIEWERS.

THEY COULD GET A SENSE OF WHAT PUNISHMENT AWAITED THEM
THE TOWN COMMISSIONER HAS ALREADY GIVEN *HIS* PERMISSION...
I *REFUSE.*

B-BUT...

YOU CAN TELL THE TOWN COMMISSIONER THAT I REFUSE.

WHY?

IF PEOPLE COULD SEE WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THEM IF THEY COMMIT A CRIME...

WOULDN'T THAT BE A REALLY USEFUL DETERRENT?

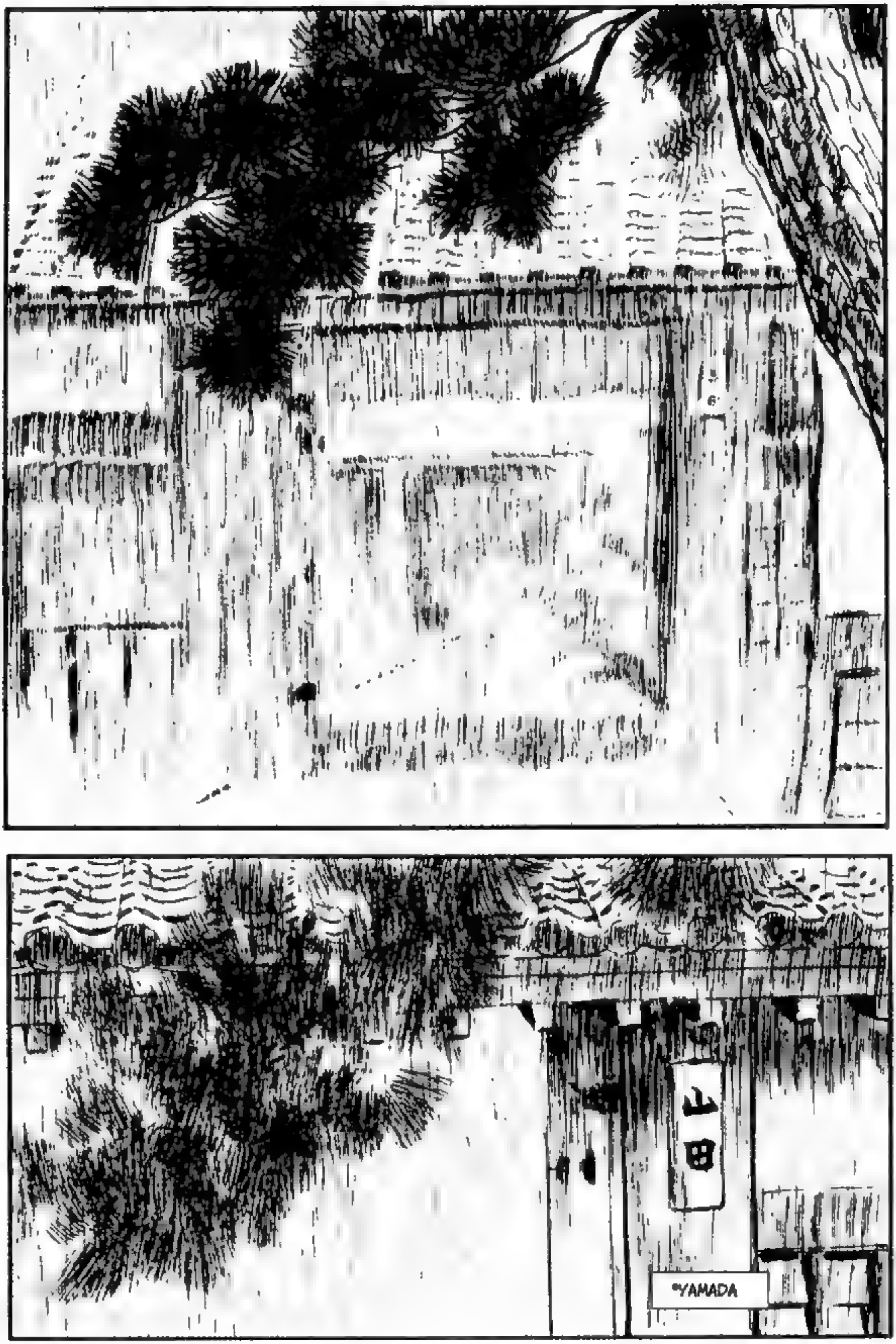
I BELIEVE THAT DRAGGING CRIMINALS AROUND TOWN AND CRUCIFYING THEM IN PUBLIC ALREADY SERVES THAT PURPOSE.

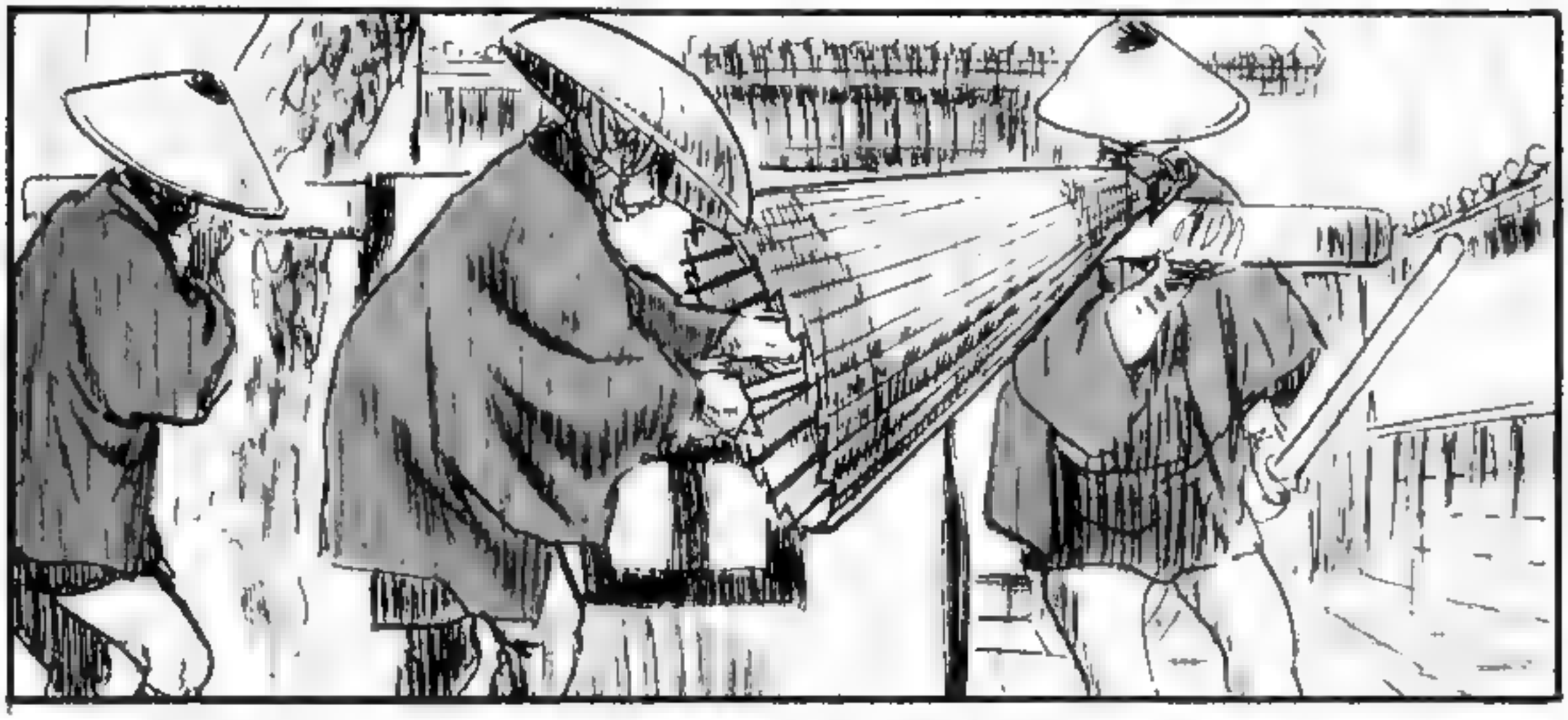
THERE IS NO NEED AT ALL FOR *PICTURES*.

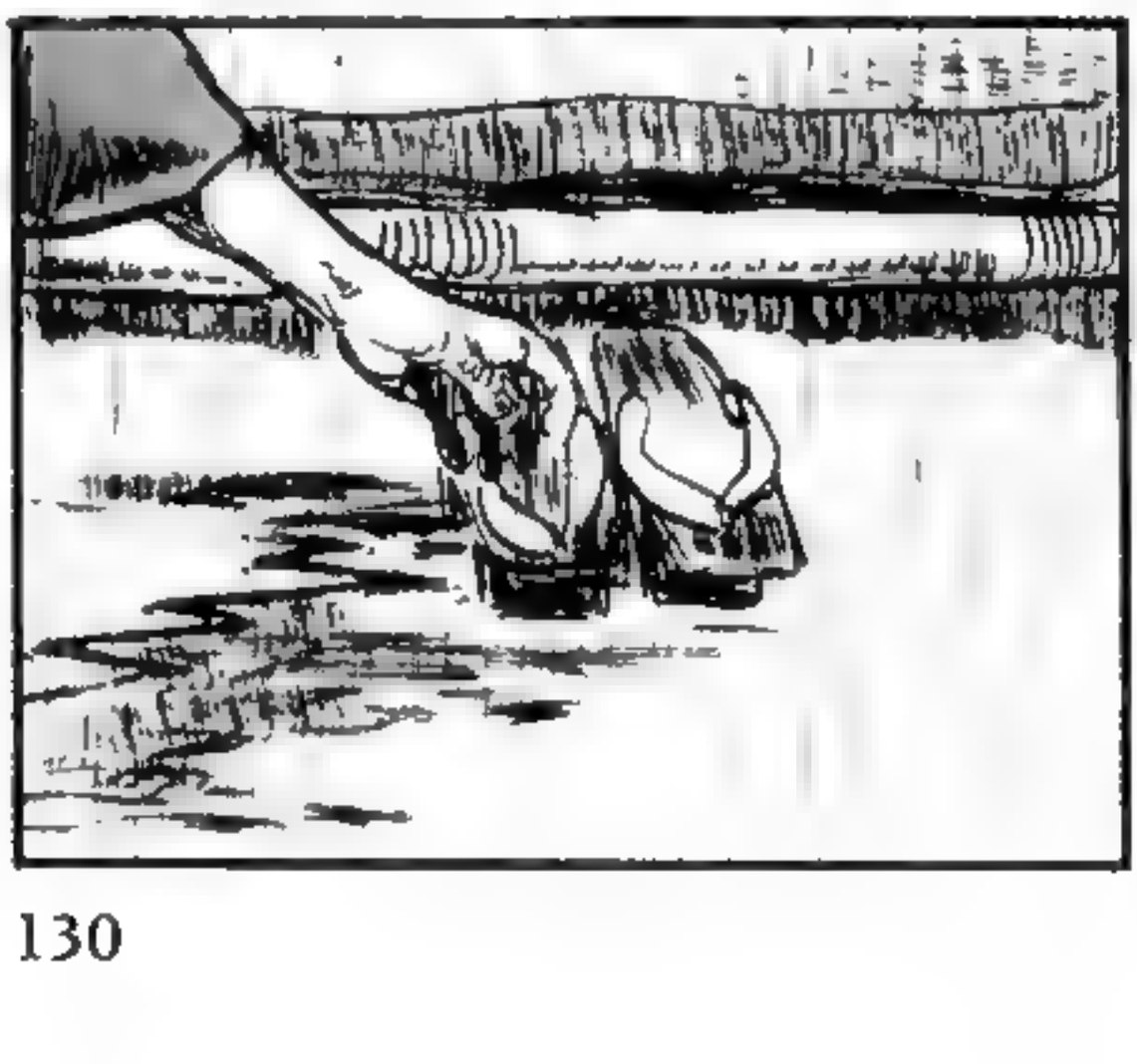
BESIDES, ONLY A FEW WEALTHY PEOPLE WILL BE ABLE TO BUY THOSE PICTURES. I DON'T WANT THE DEATH THROES OF THE CONDEMNED TO BE PRESERVED FOR POSTERITY.

ALSO, IT WOULD BE TERRIBLY SAD FOR THE CONDEMNED TO HAVE SUCH PICTURES OF THEM TO BE PASSED DOWN TO FUTURE GENERATIONS.

WELL, IF YOU REFUSE, I GUESS I HAVE NO CHOICE...


YAMADA





EXCUSE ME.

WHAT IS IT?

I'M *KAWAI JŌFŪ.* I'M AN *ARTIST.*

SO *YOU...*

...MADE THOSE *HORRIBLE* PICTURES.

I
REFUSE.

EVEN
IF...?

I
REFUSE.

SHK
SH

COULD YOU TELL ME WHY?

I HAVE A QUESTION FOR YOU.
WHY DO YOU HAVE TO PAINT SUCH THINGS?! FAME? MONEY? VANITY?

OR DO YOU INTEND TO SHOW THE PUBLIC THE EXECUTION GROUNDS BECAUSE YOU BELIEVE IN RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE?

YOU'RE *WRONG.*

A *TRUE* ARTIST LOVES FLOWERS AND GAZES AT THE MOUNTAINS AND RIVERS. HE FEELS THE CHANGING OF THE SEASONS. TO DEPICT SUCH THINGS IS THE ESSENCE OF *REAL* ART.

ANYTHING ELSE IS JUST A WAY TO APPEASE THE FICKLE CURIOSITY OF THE PUBLIC.

TELL ME... SO YOU CAN GIVE THIS UP... WHAT APPEALS TO YOU ABOUT EXECUTION?

DON'T PLAY ANY GAMES.

TELL ME THE *TRUTH!*

IT'S *PASSION.*

AN ARTIST HAS TO FEEL A *BURNING* ATTACHMENT TO THE OBJECT OF HIS WORK TO PAINT IT. SOMETIMES MERE FEELINGS AREN'T ENOUGH.

THE SIMPLE DEPICTION OF SUPERFICIAL BEAUTY IS *NOT* ART.

I BELIEVE THAT ONLY ART FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT OF THE ARTIST CAN MOVE THE HEARTS OF OTHERS.

TENACITY IS THE SPIRIT OF *MY* ART.

AND ONE MORE THING-- I WANT TO SPEAK TO THE PUBLIC THROUGH MY PICTURES.

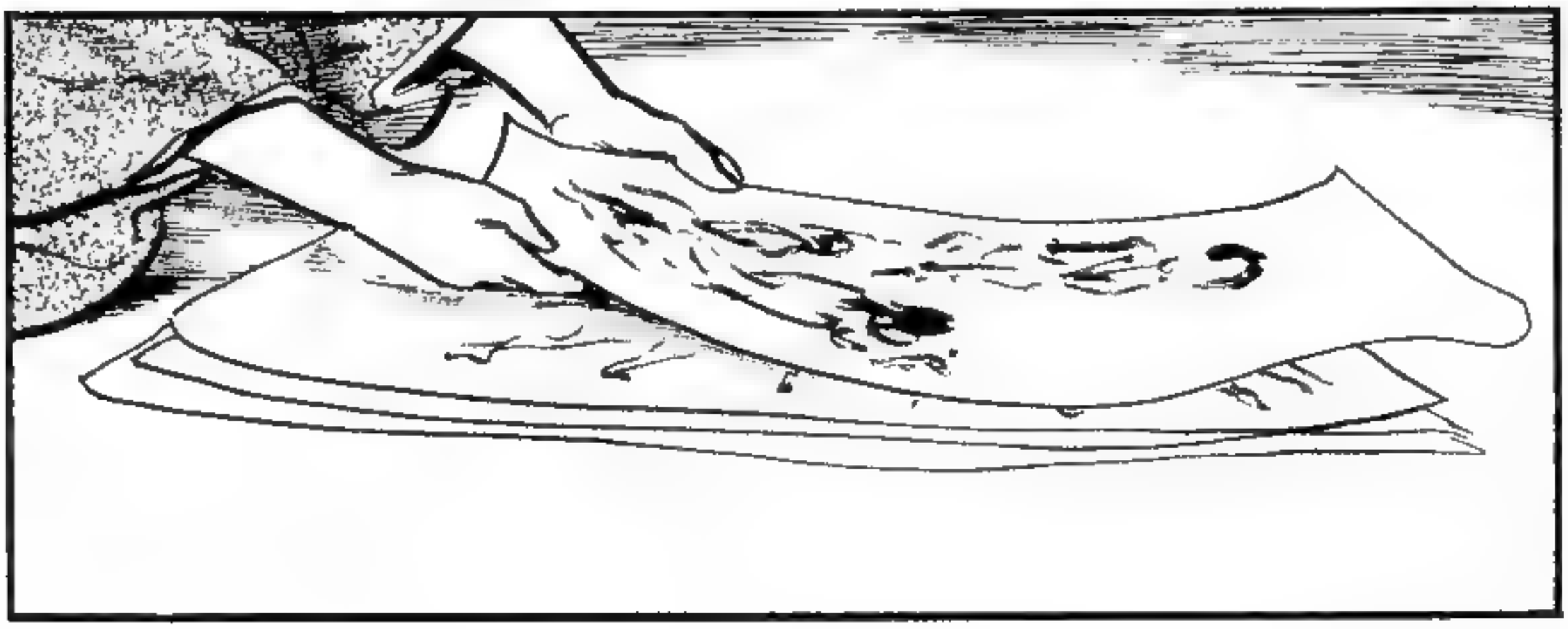
I DON'T PAINT TO TEACH PEOPLE ABOUT PUNISHMENT. I DO IT TO EXPRESS THE VALUE OF LIFE.

THE VALUE OF LIFE...

THAT'S WHY I BECAME AN ARTIST.
THAT'S WHY I'M SO ATTACHED TO MY WORK.

THAT IS WHY I WANT TO SEE EXECUTION AND SWORD-TESTING WITH MY OWN EYES. I WANT TO PAINT HONEST PICTURES THAT WILL TOUCH OTHERS. I WANT PEOPLE TO LEARN THE VALUE OF LIFE FROM MY WORK.

PLEASE LOOK AT THIS.



GASP!

IT'S A PICTURE OF A LIVE SWORD TEST-- THE "WALKING SURPLICE."

THIS ONE IS OF THE "SWORD-DRAWING SURPLICE."

GASP!

THE "HANGING TORSO."

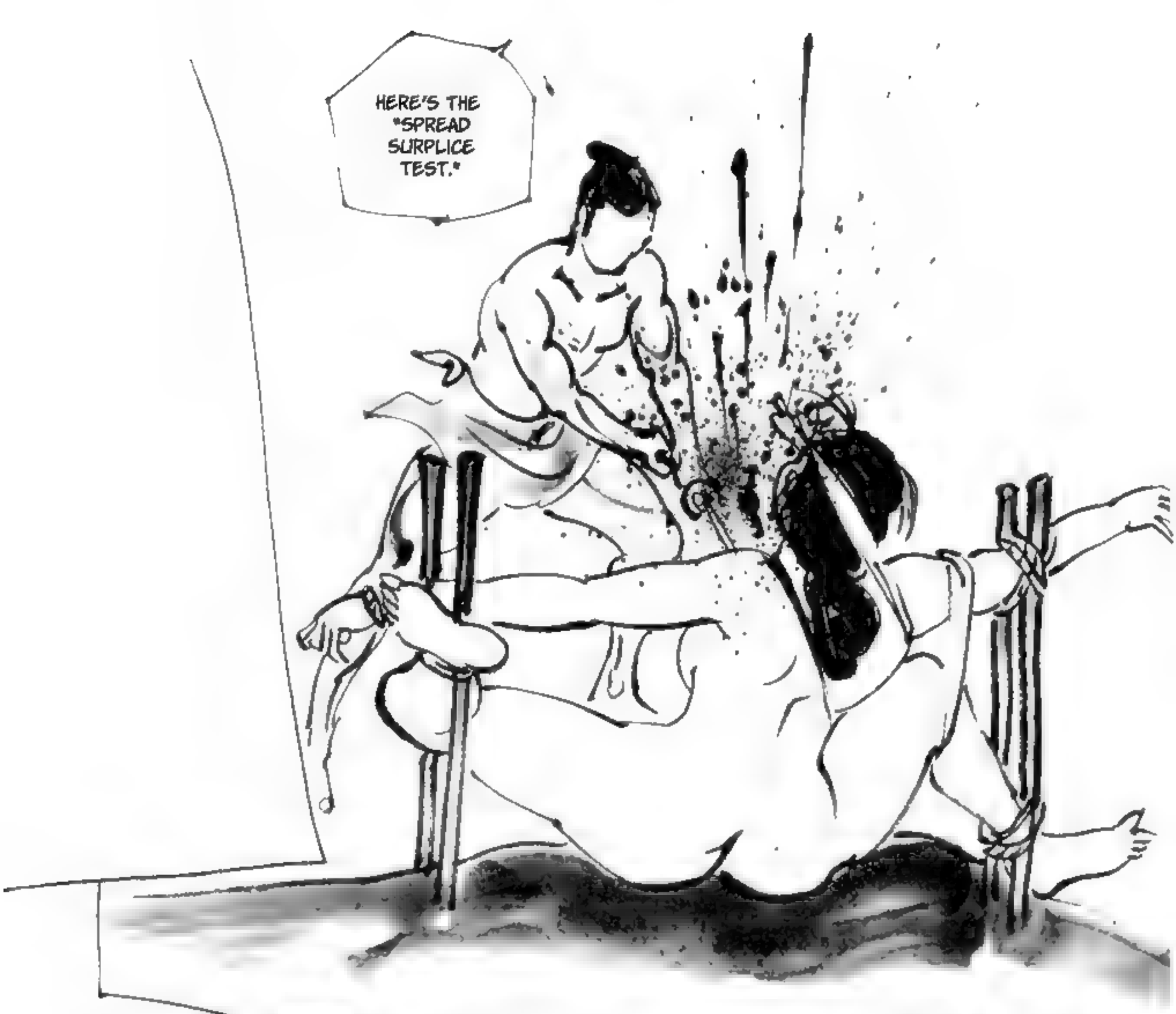
THE "ACROSS THE TORSO."

THE "SINGLE-HANDED STRIKE."

AND THE "GRAND SURPLICE."

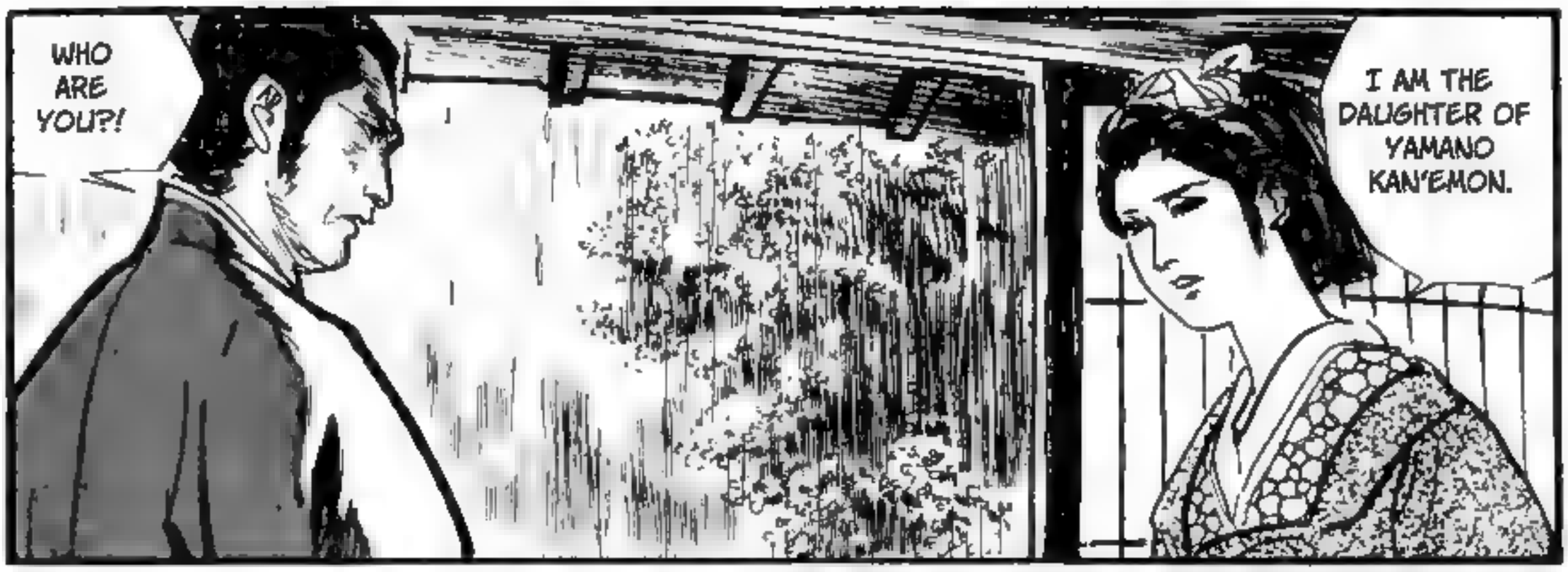
ALL OF THESE PICTURES SHOW A *PROFOUND* UNDERSTANDING OF SWORD TESTING...

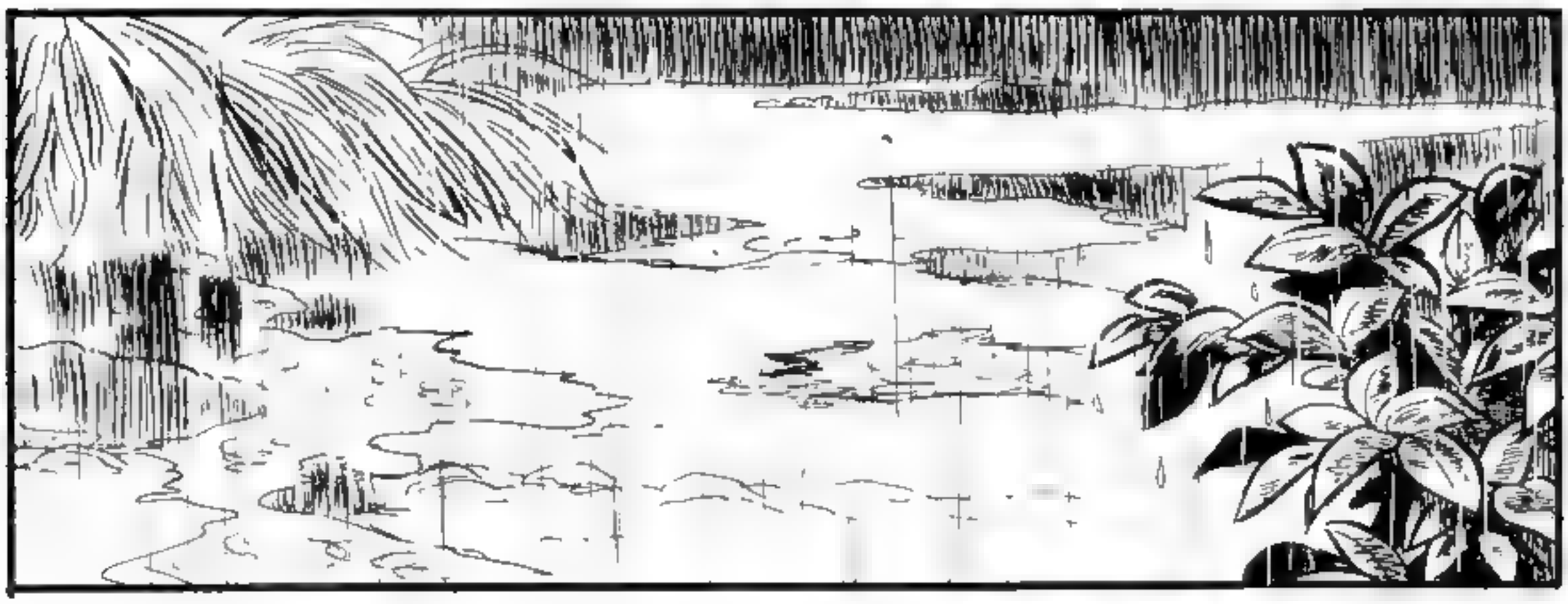
...INCLUDING THE *DEEPEST* SECRETS OF THE ART!


HERE'S THE "SPREAD SURPLICE TEST."

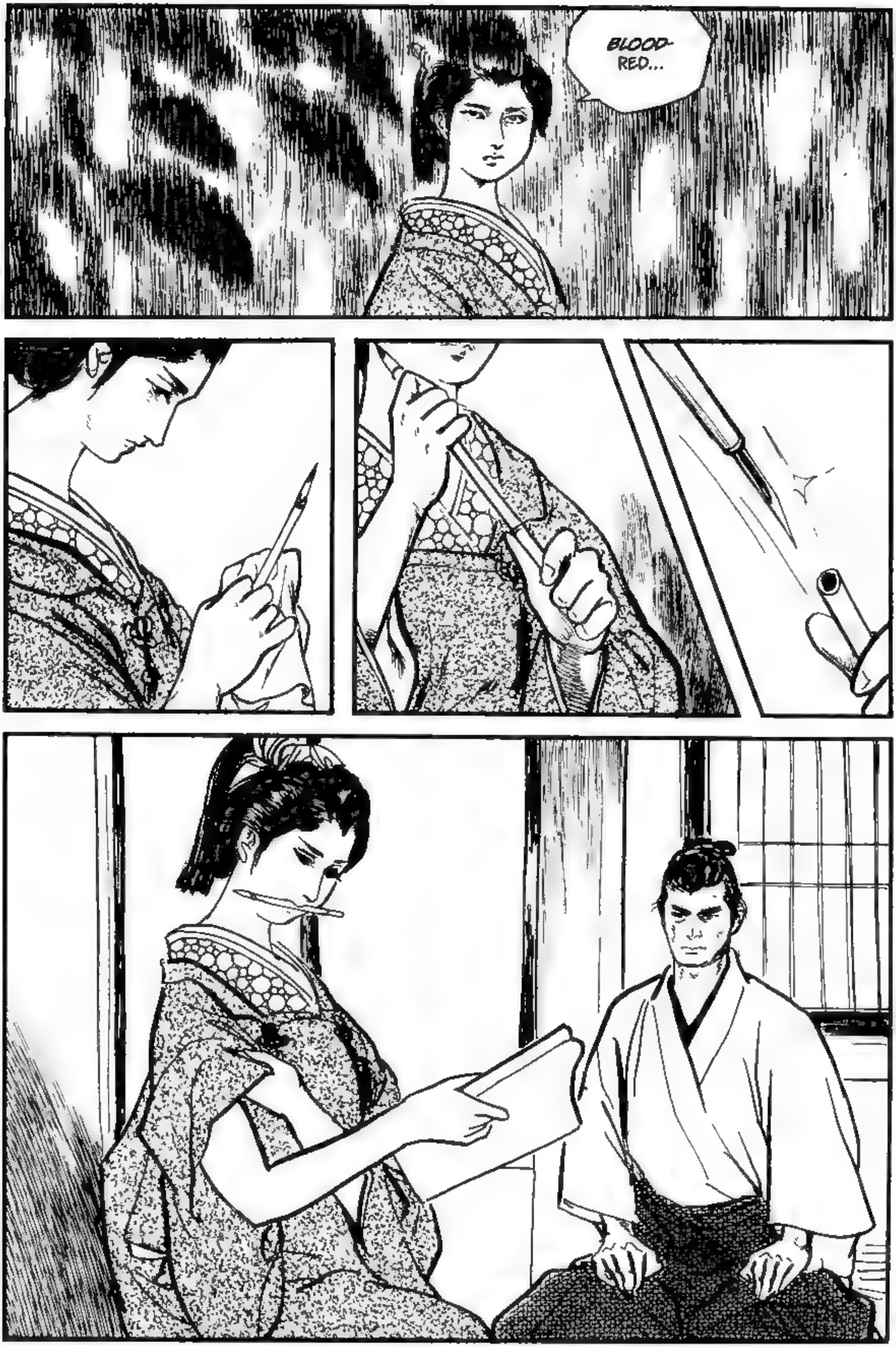
YOU *COULDN'T* HAVE PAINTED THESE PICTURES FROM YOUR IMAGINATION. YOU *COULDN'T* HAVE BEEN A MERE OBSERVER.
ONLY A SWORD TESTER COULD HAVE PAINTED THEM.

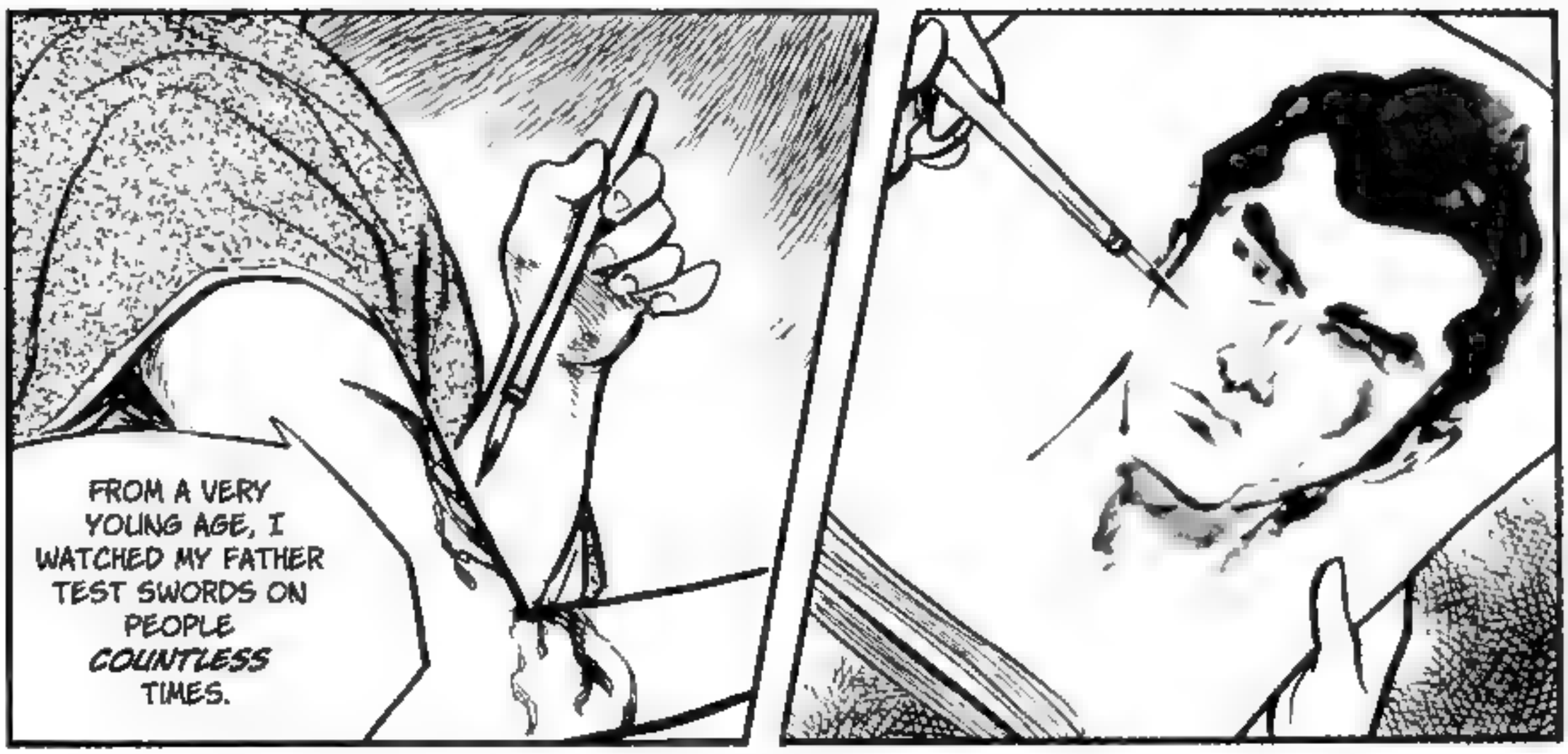
YOU SAID YOUR NAME WAS KAWAI JŌFŪ, BUT WHAT'S YOUR *REAL* NAME?


WHO ARE YOU?!
I AM THE DAUGHTER OF YAMANO KAN'EMON.



YAMANO-DONO OF THE KAN'EMON SCHOOL OF SWORD TESTING?
MY NAME IS YAMANO SHŌKO.
THIS RAIN IS *RED* IN MY YES...


BLOOD-
RED...


FROM A VERY YOUNG AGE, I WATCHED MY FATHER TEST SWORDS ON PEOPLE *COUNTLESS* TIMES.

WHEN I CLOSE MY EYES, I CAN REMEMBER HIM DOING IT.
THAT'S WHY I'M CONFIDENT ENOUGH TO PAINT SWORD TESTING.

BUT WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE "CHINESE BAMBOO SPLIT" DURING LIVE SWORD TESTING, I'VE *NEVER* SEEN A BEHEADING...

MY FATHER MOSTLY TESTED SWORDS ON WOMEN. YOU AGREE THAT THESE PICTURES CONVEY THE TRUTH ABOUT LIVE TESTING. I WANT MY PICTURES OF BEHEADING TO DO THE SAME.

DRIP

DRIP

I WENT TO THE TOWN COMMISSIONER TO ASK FOR PERMISSION TO SEE A REAL BEHEADING.

I WAS COMMITTED TO SEE THE TRUTH WITH MY OWN EYES AND PUT IT ON PAPER.

IT'S BECAUSE I THINK THAT *ONLY* PICTURES THAT EXPRESS THE *TRUTH*...

...CAN TOUCH THE *HEART* AND CONVEY THE IMPORTANCE OF *LIFE*.

PLEASE ALLOW ME TO PUT YOUR FACE IN MY PICTURES.

IF I CAN SEE AN ACTUAL EXECUTION AND INSERT YOUR FACE...

...*THEN* MY PICTURES WILL EXPRESS THE TRUTH

THAT IS WHY I WOULD LIKE YOUR PERMISSION.

I *COULD* GIVE IT...

...BUT ONLY FOR PICTURES OF *BEHEADINGS*. THESE SWORD TESTING PICTURES ARE OF *YAMANO-DONO*.

I DON'T THINK THEY WOULD CONVEY THE TRUTH ABOUT THE KAN'EMON SCHOOL IF *MY* FACE WERE IN THEM

NO, THEY *WOULD.*

MY FATHER HAS *ALREADY* DISAPPEARED FROM MEMORY.

NOW THE WORLD THINKS THAT ONLY *YOU* TEST SWORDS AND EXECUTE PEOPLE.

THAT BEING THE CASE, THESE PICTURES *WOULD* BE TRUE.

CONVERSELY, IT WOULD BE *FALSE* IF I USED MY FATHER'S FACE INSTEAD.

HOW WILL PICTURES SHOWING THE TRUTH TEACH THE VALUE OF LIFE?

ALSO, WHY DO YOU HAVE TO GO THIS FAR TO PAINT SUCH THINGS? I DON'T UNDERSTAND...

DID YOU HEAR ABOUT MY FATHER'S FINAL LIVE SWORD TEST?

NO...

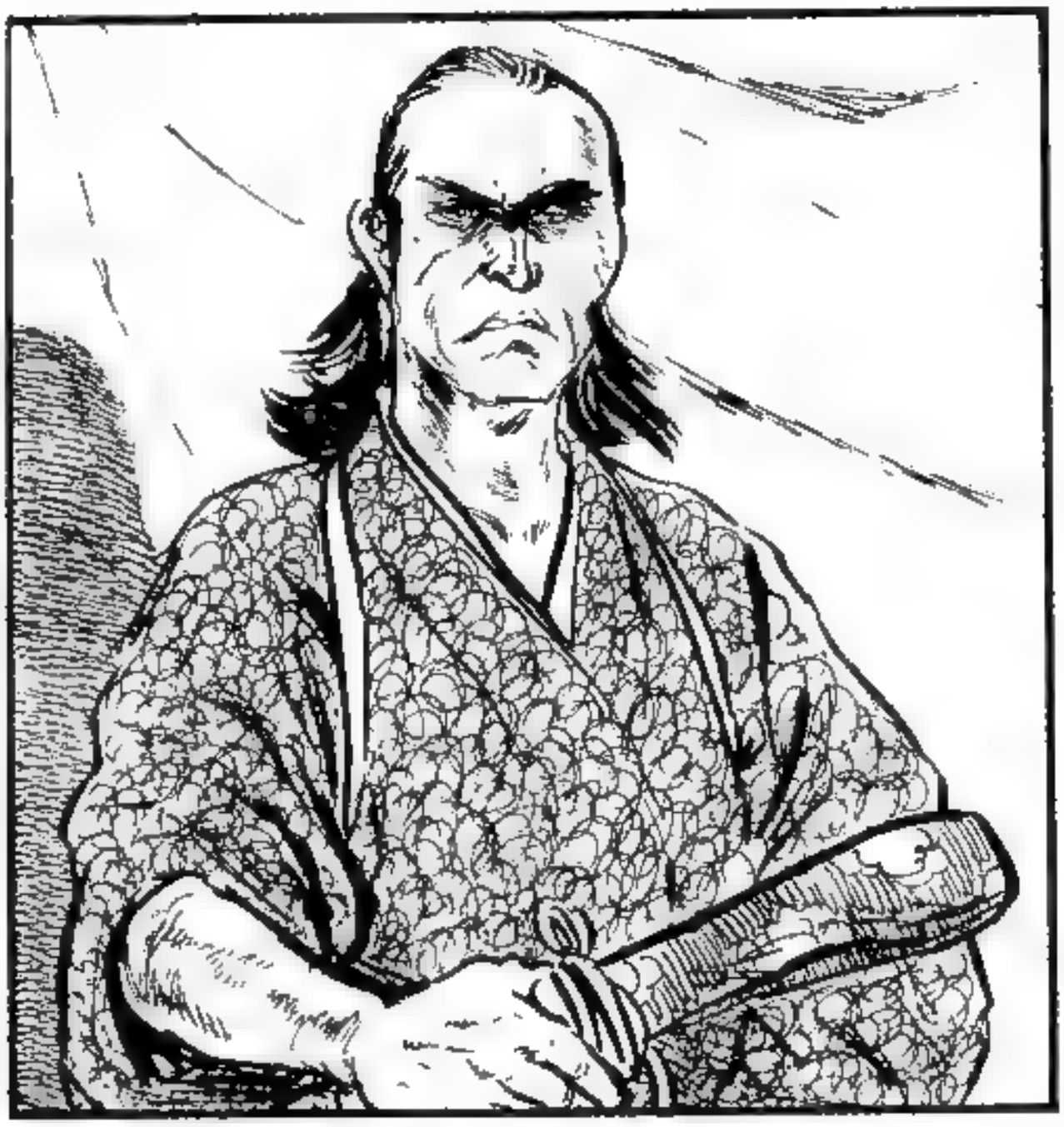
IT WAS DURING THE SUMMER..ELEVEN YEARS AGO.

"AT THE TIME, LIVE SWORD TESTING WAS CONDUCTED ON THE BANKS OF A LARGE RIVER THAT YOU COULD SEE FROM TSUKUDA ISLAND.

"THERE WAS A LOT OF WATER FOR WASHING. NO STENCH COULD LINGER THERE. AND IT WAS OUT OF SIGHT.

"SO IT WAS ALSO CONVENIENT FOR THE DISPOSAL OF CORPSES AND GARBAGE.

"WE TRAVELED THERE BY BOAT."



EEEK!

OH!

AAAH!

AH!

GLUG!

UGH!

GULP...

DAMN!

GLUG!

AAAH!

CRUNCH!

GGGULP!

IF YER GONNA TEST YER SWORD ON ME, *GO FOR IT!*

AAAH! DAMN!

IF YOU'RE GONNA CUT INTA ME, I'M GONNA EAT THESE ROCKS!

DAMN YOU!

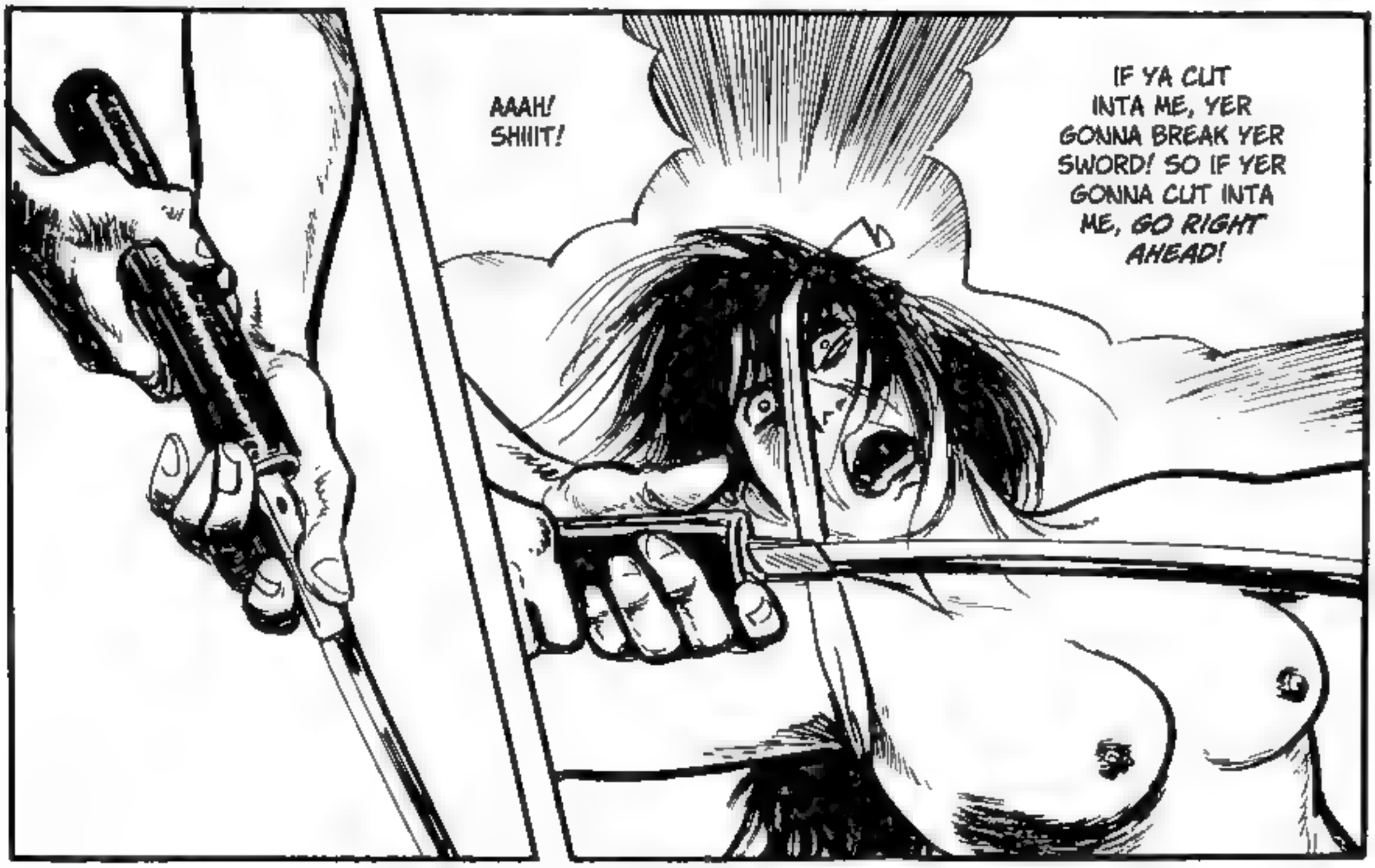
OWWW!

CHOMP!

SO GO CUT INTA ME! I DUNNO IF THAT'S THE SHOGUN'S SWORD OR NOT, BUT CUTTIN' LIVE PEOPLE...

THAT... THAT'S SOMETHIN' *NOBODY* DESERVES!

NOT EVEN A CRIMINAL LIKE *ME*!


AAAH!
SHIIIT!
IF YA CUT INTA ME, YER GONNA BREAK YER SWORD! SO IF YER GONNA CUT INTA ME, GO RIGHT AHEAD!

EEE...

UNGH!

BBBHHHH...

EEEKU

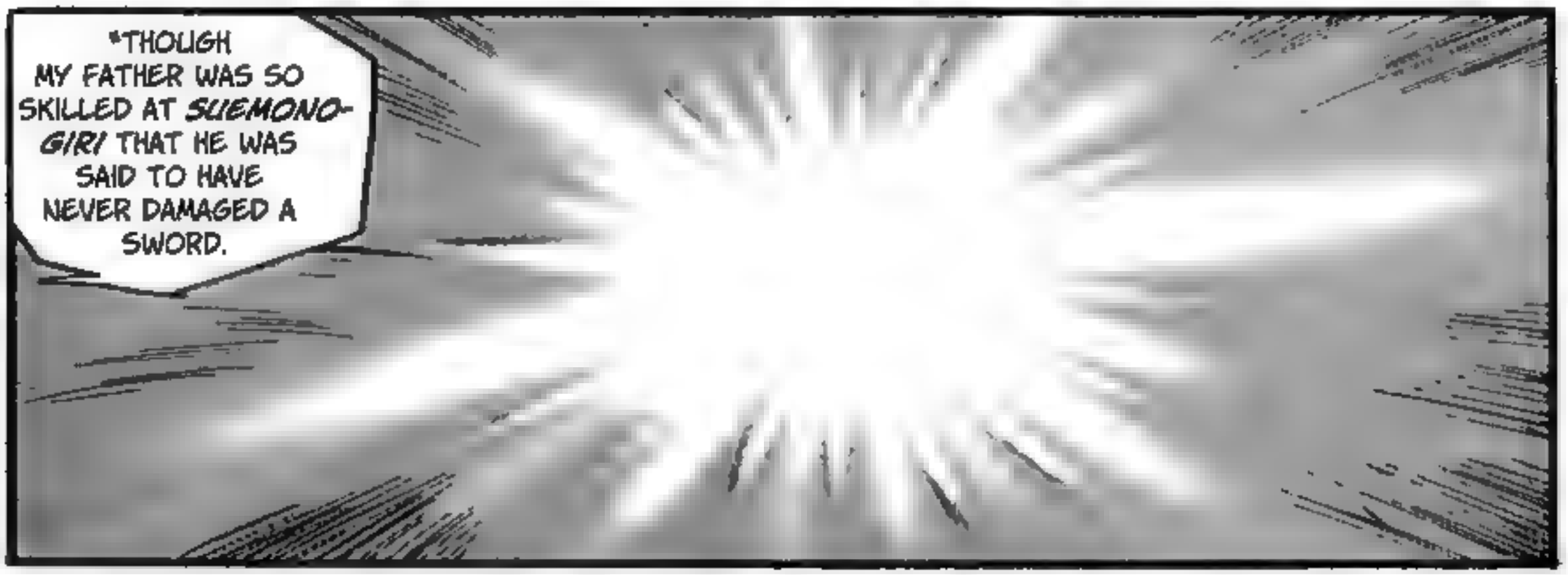
DZAHHHH!!

GASP!

TH-
THIS
IS ...

"WAS IT JUST MIS-FORTUNE...
"...A FREAK ACCIDENT...
"...OR WAS IT DUE TO THE DEAD WOMAN'S GRUDGE ...?

"THE STONES HAD SOMEHOW DAMAGED THE IRON OF THE SWORD...

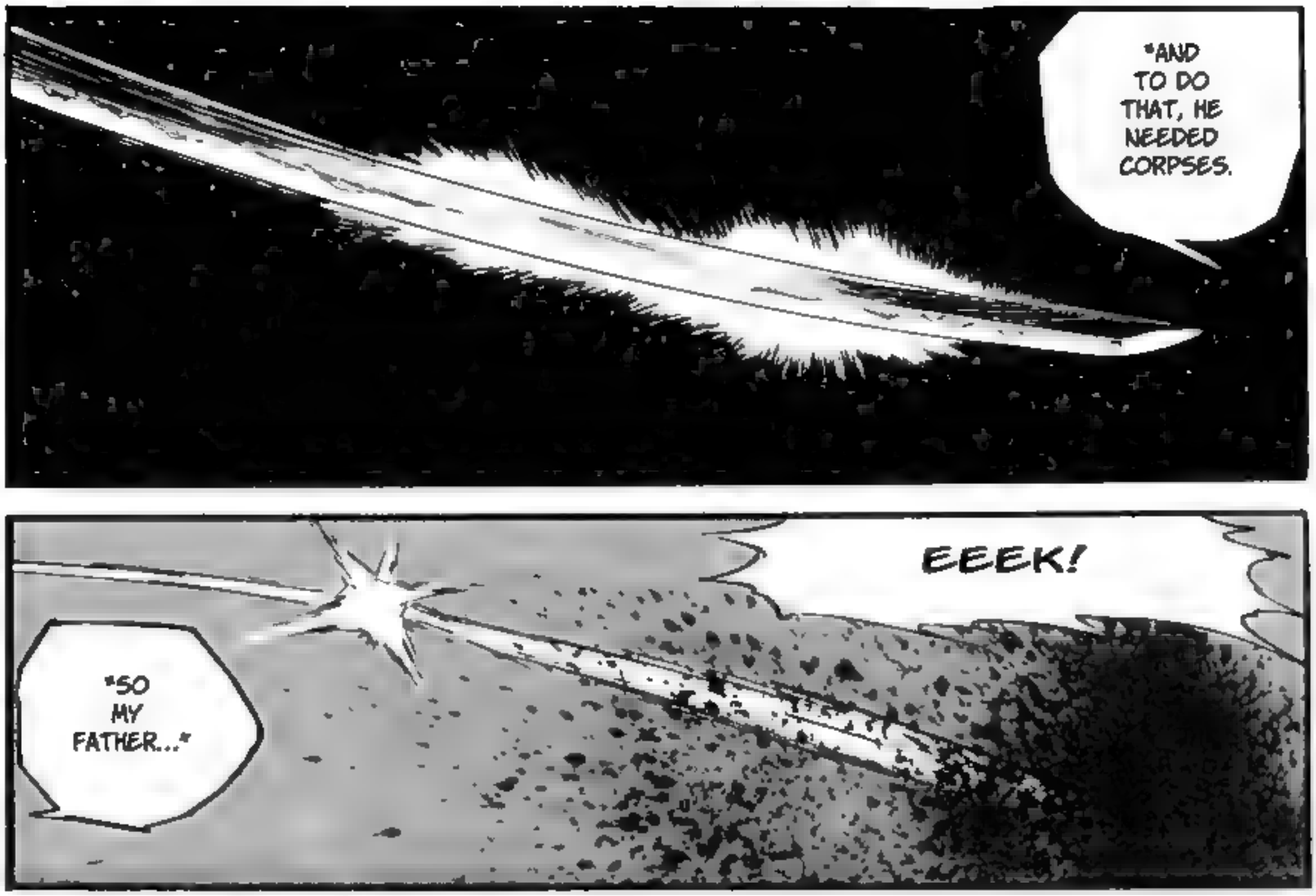

"THOUGH MY FATHER WAS SO SKILLED AT *SUEMONO-GIRI* THAT HE WAS SAID TO HAVE NEVER DAMAGED A SWORD.

"AND...

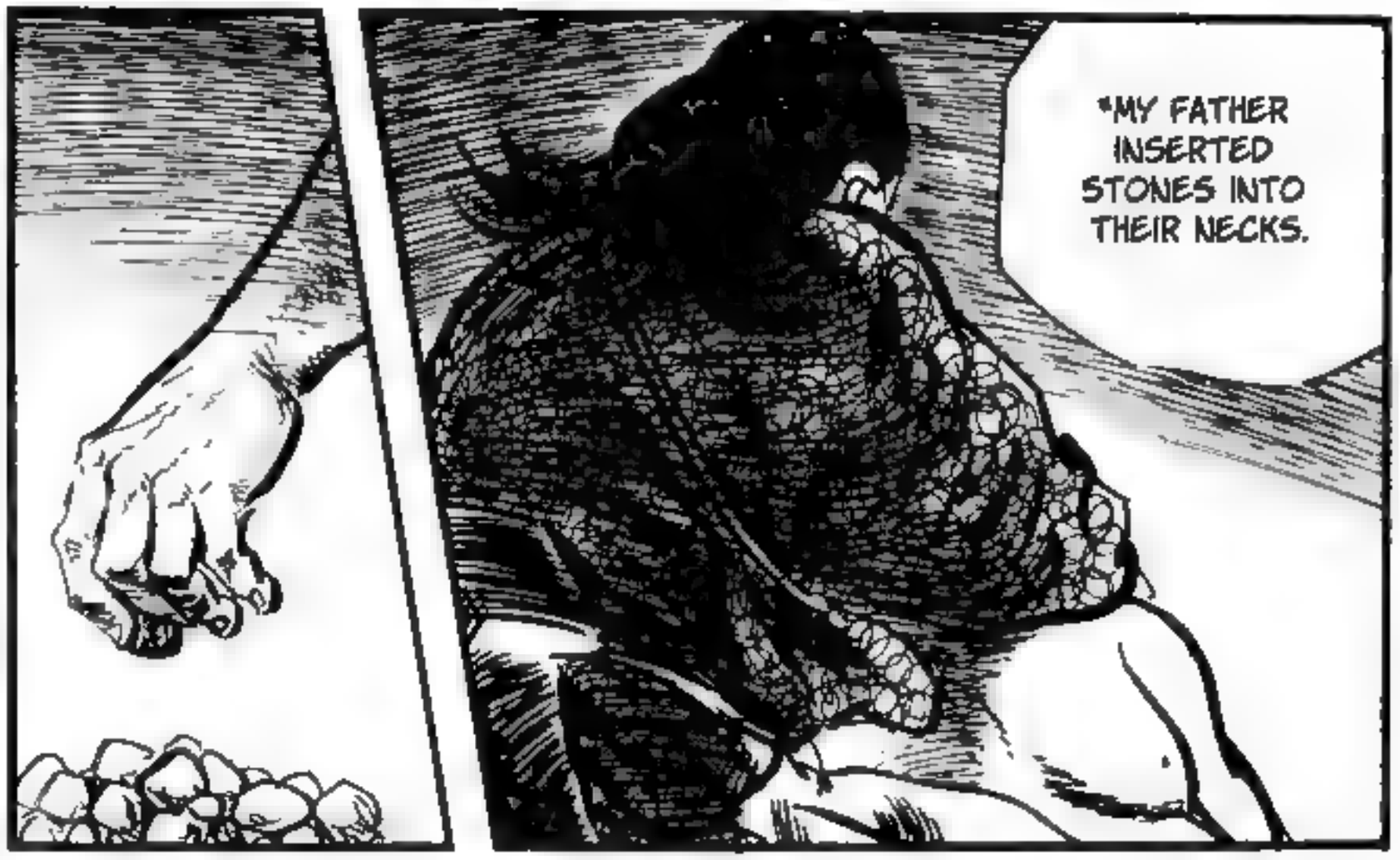
"NEEDLESS TO SAY, MY FATHER WAS RELIEVED OF HIS DUTIES."

UNTIL THEN, HE HAD BEEN THE FEARSOME KAN'EMON, MASTER OF LIVE SWORD TESTING. BUT NOW THE MOCKERY OF THE WORLD WAS TOO MUCH FOR HIM.
EVERY SINGLE ONE OF HIS DISCIPLES ABANDONED HIM.
AS A MASTER OF HIS ART, MY FATHER COULDN'T ACCEPT WHAT WAS HAPPENING TO HIM.

PEOPLE FLOUNDER WHEN THEIR ONCE FIRM SELF-CONFIDENCE CRUMBLES APART.
MY FATHER WAS NO EXCEPTION...TO COPE WITH AN UNFORGIVING WORLD, HE NEEDED TO FIGURE OUT WHY THE SWORD HAD BEEN DAMAGED.


"AND TO DO THAT, HE NEEDED CORPSES.
EEEK!
"SO MY FATHER..."
"...BEGAN TO KILL PEOPLE IN THE STREETS.

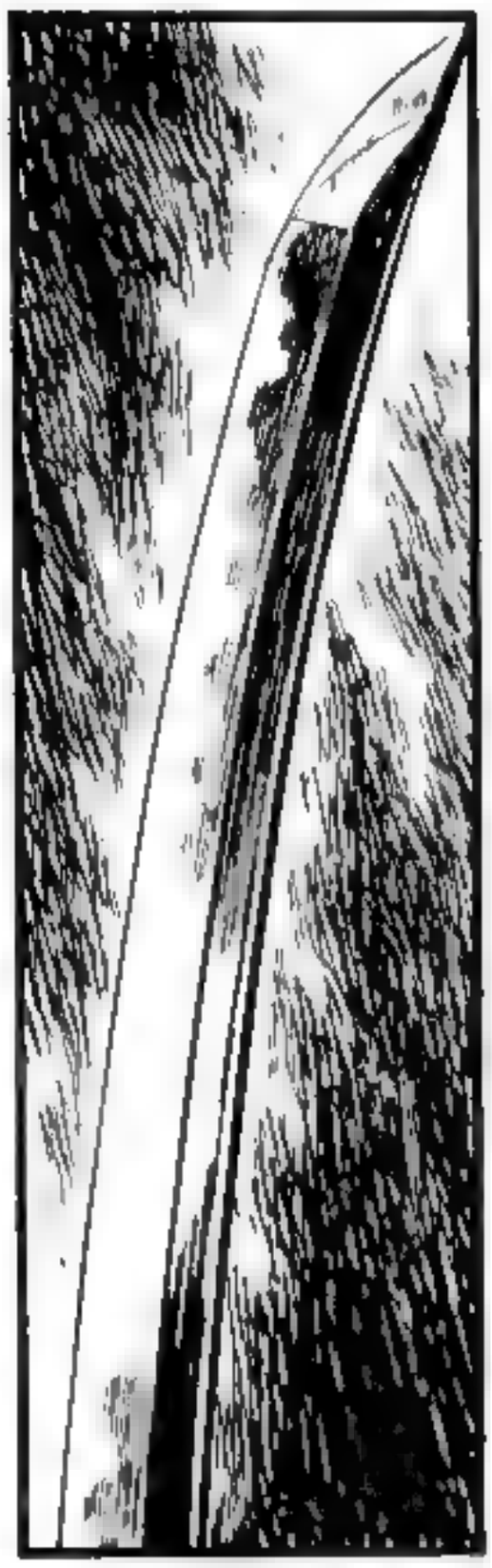
*HE PUT THEIR BODIES INTO BARREL COFFINS AND BROUGHT THEM HOME.


*MY FATHER INSERTED STONES INTO THEIR NECKS.

"HE EVEN CUT OPEN THEIR BOWELS TO INSERT STONES INTO THEM.

"THEN..."

YAAAH!
DBZHAK!



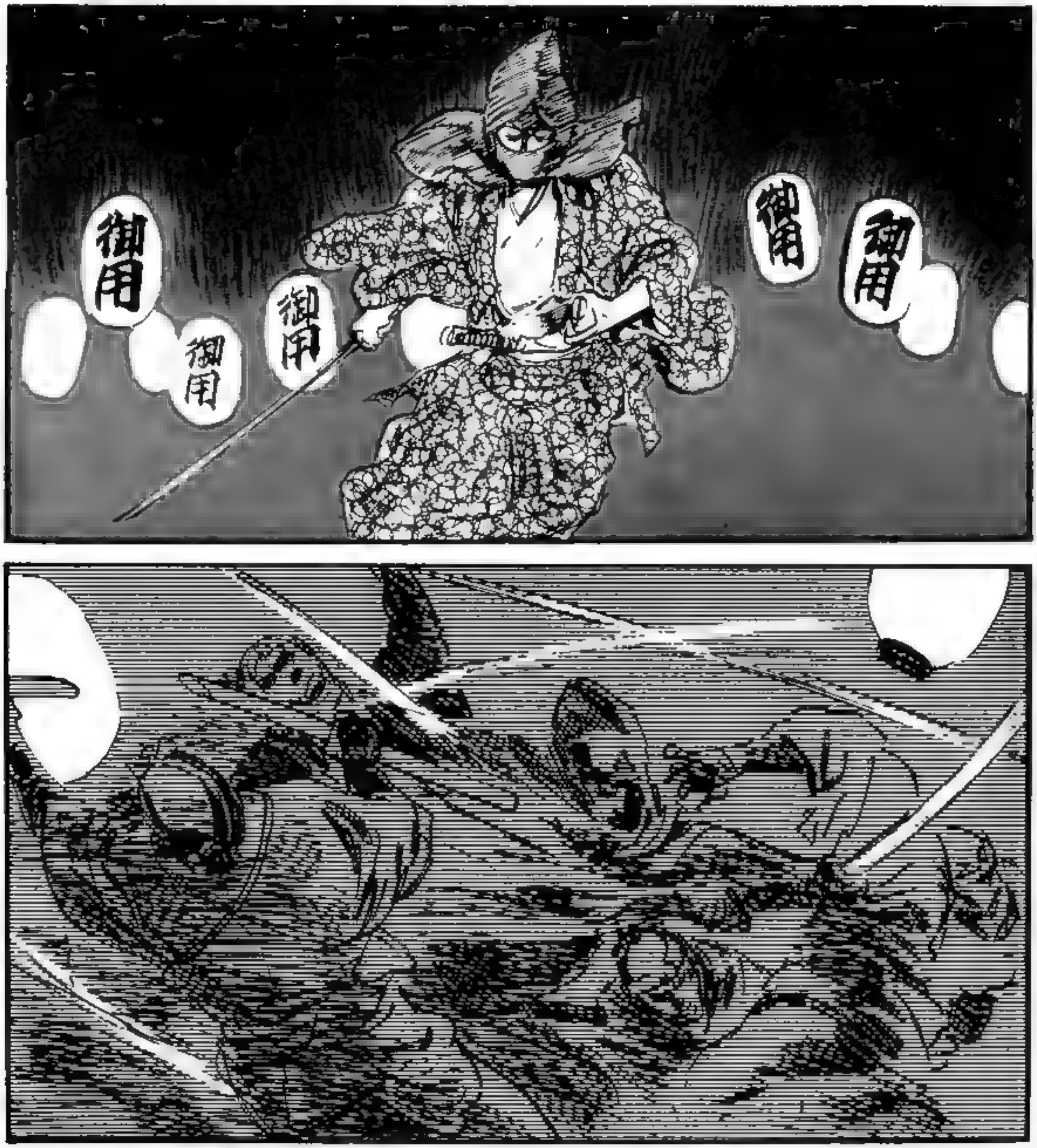
I... I DON'T UNDER-STAND...
W- WHY...

SHAKK!
ARGHHH!

EEEK!

ARGHHH!

*THEN MY FATHER WENT MAD.
MY ONCE NOBLE FATHER...


御用
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御用

"IT WAS AS IF MY FATHER HAD BECOME A *LIVING BLADE.*

"MY FATHER TURNED EDO INTO A *SEA OF BLOODSHED AND TERROR* AFTER DARK...

"THE POLICE WENT WILD TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHO THE KILLER WAS."

I DON'T UNDERSTAND... *WHY?!*

WHY WAS THE SWORD DAMAGED *THEN?!*

DBZHAH!

NOTHING HAPPENED EVEN AFTER I STUCK ROCKS IN HER!

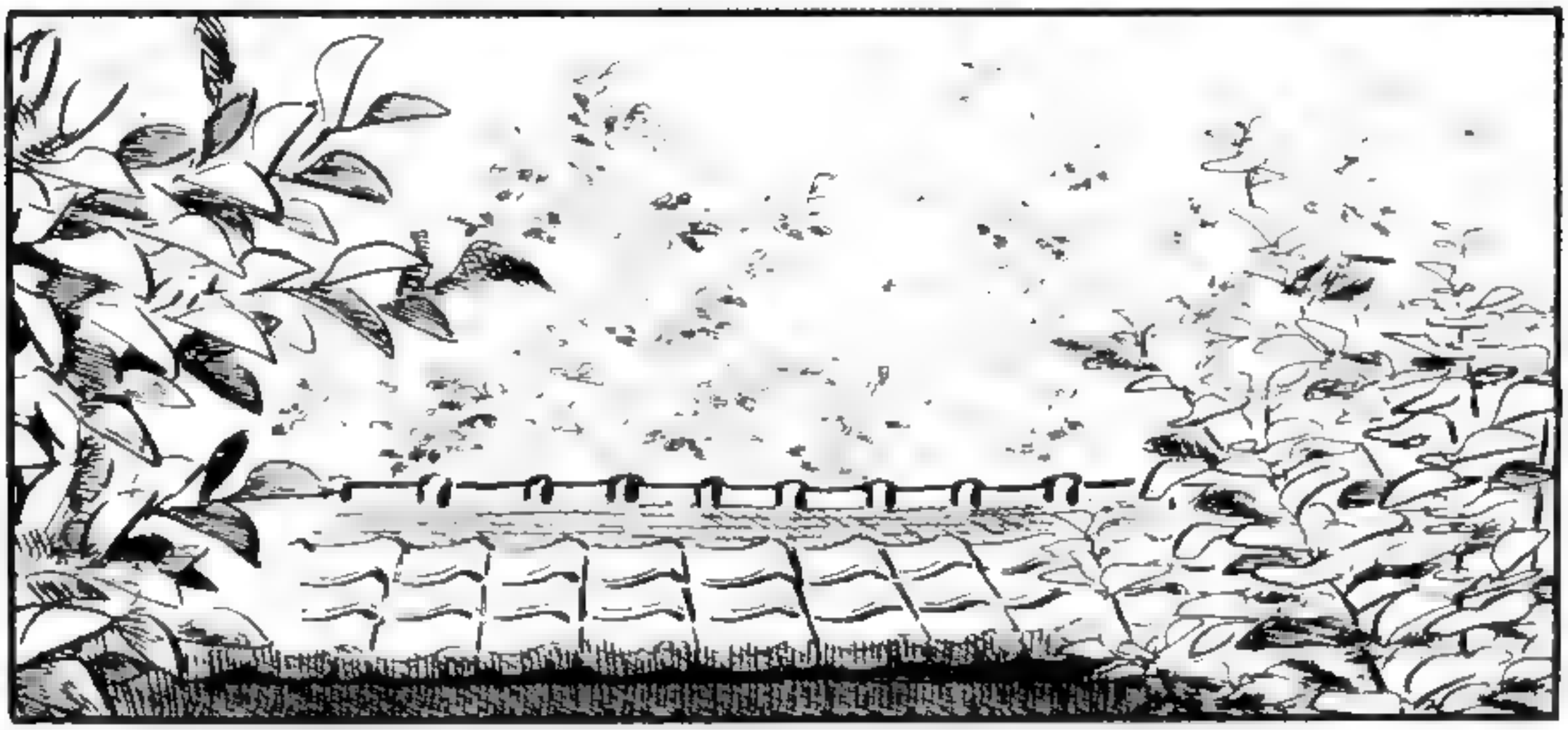
W-WHY ONLY *THEN* AND NOT *NOW*?!
ARGH... I-I DON'T UNDERSTAND!

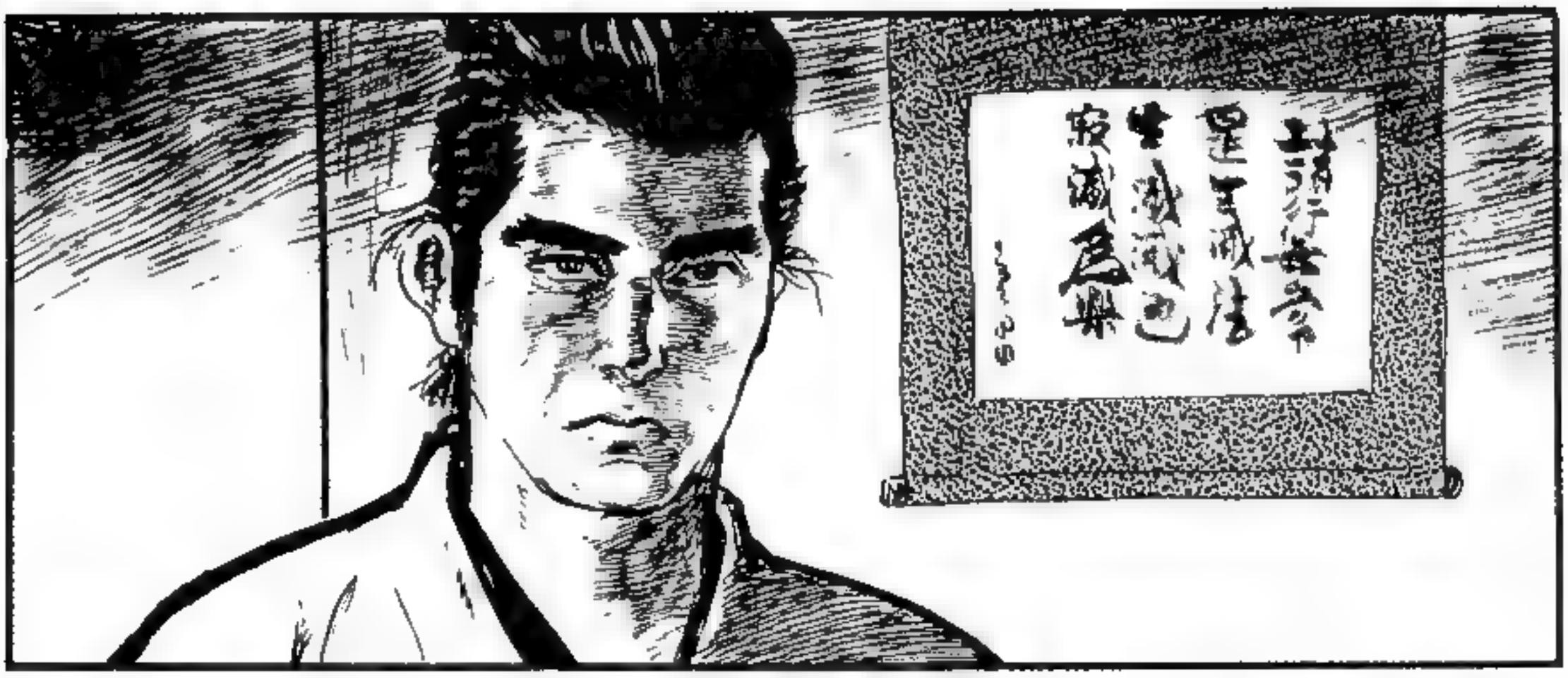
AAAH!

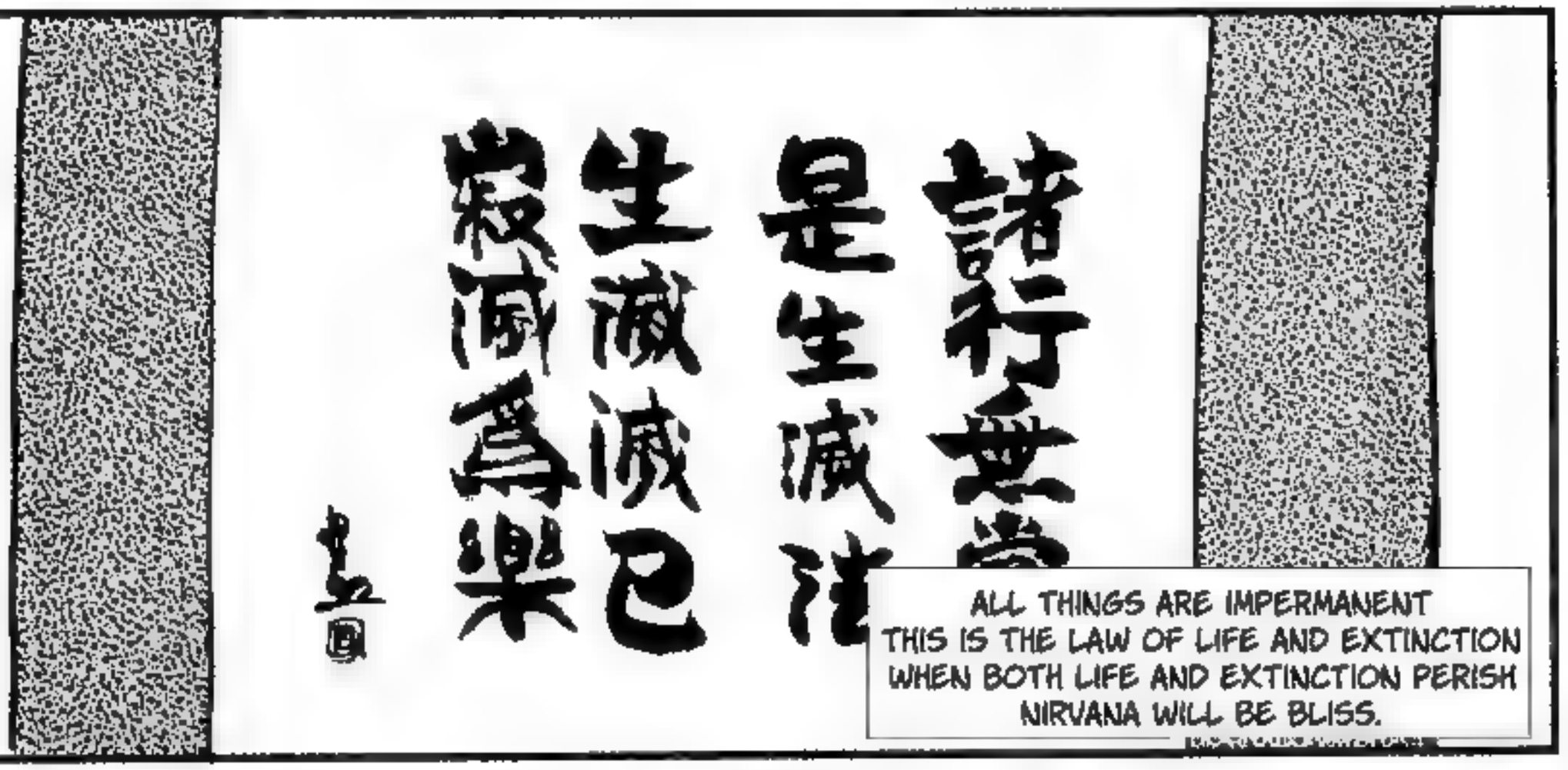
TAP

SO...I KILLED MY FATHER.

IT WASN'T BECAUSE I DIDN'T WANT MY FATHER TO KILL ANYONE ANYMORE.
IT WAS BECAUSE I COULDN'T STAND TO SEE HIM SUFFER ANYMORE.
EVEN I WAS GOING CRAZY.
HE DIED BY MY HANDS...
SO I COULD HIDE HIS SHAME... OR SO I THOUGHT...






諸行無常
是生滅法
生滅滅已
寂滅爲樂
ALL THINGS ARE IMPERMANENT
THIS IS THE LAW OF LIFE AND EXTINCTION
WHEN BOTH LIFE AND EXTINCTION PERISH
NIRVANA WILL BE BLISS.

WHY DID KAN'EMON-*DONO* MAKE YOU WATCH HIM TEST SWORDS? AND WHY DID HE MAKE YOU PAINT WHAT HE DID? YOU WERE JUST A *LITTLE GIRL.*

YAMADA-*SAMA,* WHEN DID *YOU* FIRST SEE A SWORD BEING TESTED?

DIDN'T *YOU* ALSO SEE LIVE SWORD TESTS AND BEHEADINGS AT A YOUNG AGE?

I THINK YOU AND I ARE VERY MUCH *ALIKE.* IT'S OUR *DESTINY.* WE WERE *BOTH* BORN INTO FAMILIES DEVOTED TO SWORD TESTING.

WE WEREN'T ALLOWED TO FEAR LIVE SWORD TESTS OR CORPSES. WE HAD TO PERPETUATE THE WAYS OF OUR FAMILIES...

YAMADA-*SAMA*, YOU'RE A *MAN*. YOU *HAD* TO DO THAT SO YOU COULD PASS ON YOUR FAMILY'S TRADITIONS TO A THIRD GENERATION.

AND I AM A *WOMAN*. SO I HAD TO TAKE UP THE *BRUSH* INSTEAD OF THE *SWORD*.

AND WHAT IS SWORD TESTING...OR BEHEADING ANYWAY?

I'VE BEEN TORTURING MYSELF WITH THAT QUESTION EVER SINCE I KILLED MY FATHER. IT'S *ALL I* CAN THINK ABOUT.

WHAT DOES IT *MEAN* FOR A HUMAN BEING TO KILL ANOTHER HUMAN BEING?

WE'RE *ALL* BORN AS HUMANS INTO THIS WORLD. WHY DO ONLY *SOME* OF THEM HAVE THE RIGHT TO KILL?! WHO GAVE THEM THAT RIGHT?!

I UNDERSTAND THAT THOSE WHO COMMIT CRIMES MUST DIE BECAUSE SOCIETY IS BASED ON LAW AND ORDER.

BUT DEEP DOWN INSIDE, I JUST *CAN'T* ACCEPT THAT.

AREN'T THERE TOO MANY CRIMES THAT A SAMURAI CAN GET AWAY WITH--*WITHOUT* BREAKING THE LAW OR BEING EXECUTED-- JUST BECAUSE THEY WERE *BORN* THAT WAY?

AND WHAT IS LIVE SWORD TESTING?! THE KILLING OF PEOPLE WHO COMMITTED CRIMES A SAMURAI WOULD GET AWAY WITH--JUST TO GAUGE THE QUALITY OF A *SWORD*?

HOW CAN A *SWORD* BE MORE IMPORTANT THAN A *HUMAN LIFE*?

PEOPLE *MAKE* SWORDS! THEY'RE JUST *TOOLS*!

WHY DO PEOPLE MAKE TOOLS TO KILL OTHER PEOPLE?! WHY DO SUCH *USELESS* THINGS HAVE TO BE MADE?!

WHY DO *PEOPLE* HAVE TO BE KILLED TO TEST *SWORDS*?

I DON'T UNDERSTAND. THAT'S WHY I WANT TO SHOW PEOPLE HOW SWORDS MADE BY MEN KILL OTHER MEN. I WANT THEM TO ASK THEMSELVES *WHY*.

IS HUMAN LIFE *THAT* WORTHLESS? SWORDS AND CASTLES ARE JUST MAN-MADE. I WANT PEOPLE TO REALIZE THAT HUMAN LIFE IS FAR MORE VALUABLE THAN *ANYTHING* ELSE.

IF MY PICTURES CAN SERVE THAT PURPOSE--IF ONLY JUST A LITTLE--THEN IT WILL HAVE BEEN *WORTH* IT. I WAS BORN INTO A FAMILY OF SWORD TESTERS. I SAW PEOPLE DYING RIGHT BEFORE MY EYES.

AND I KILLED MY OWN FATHER. *THAT'S* WHY I WANT TO EXPRESS THE IMPORTANCE OF LIFE.

PLEASE UNDERSTAND!
PLEASE LISTEN TO ME...

WHY DID YOU PAINT THIS WITH YOUR OWN BLOOD?
IT'S BECAUSE I HADN'T PREPARED ANY INK...

DIDN'T YOU THINK THAT MIGHT BE *RUDE?*

NO!

IT'S PAINTED WITH THE PASSION IN MY BLOOD.

PASS ME A BRUSH AND SOME PAPER...

GASP!

諸行無常
是生滅法
生滅滅已
寂滅爲樂

ALL THINGS ARE
IMPERMANENT THIS
IS THE LAW OF LIFE AND
EXTINCTION WHEN BOTH LIFE AND
EXTINCTION PERISH NIRVANA WILL BE BLISS.

THESE ARE THE WORDS I LIVE BY.
THIS IS MY ANSWER TO YOUR REQUEST.
I WOULD LIKE YOU TO TAKE THAT WITH YOU.
Y- YES.

NORTH TOWN COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

I WOULD LIKE KAWAI JŌFŪ TO BE MY *WIFE.*

COULD YOU PLEASE ARRANGE THIS FOR ME?

KEH KEH. AND I ALWAYS THOUGHT YOU HAD NO FEELINGS!

SO WHAT BROUGHT ABOUT *THIS* TURN OF EVENTS?

PLEASE...

SO YOU REALLY WANT ME TO BE YOUR MATCHMAKER, HUH?

AND YOU...

YOU MIGHT GET ALONG WITH JŌFŪ. I HEAR SHE'S THE DAUGHTER OF YAMANO KAN'EMON.

IF SHE CAN DRAW SUCH VISIONS OF HELL, SHE MUST REALLY KNOW A LOT ABOUT EXECUTIONS AND LIVE SWORD TESTS.

IF SHE BECOMES MY WIFE, SHE WILL *NEVER* PAINT AGAIN.

WHAT?!

PLEASE BE MY MATCHMAKER.

DOES JŌFŪ KNOW ABOUT THIS?

NO, SHE HAS *NO* IDEA.

W-WHAT?! Y-YOU...

WHAT COULD YOU *POSSIBLY* SEE IN ME?

WHEN I HEARD FROM INAO-*SAMA* THAT YOU WANTED TO MARRY ME, I WAS ABSOLUTELY *SHOCKED*.

WHY?

IS IT BECAUSE I'M YAMANO KAN'EMON'S DAUGHTER? BECAUSE I'M ACCUSTOMED TO THE SIGHT OF BLOOD? BECAUSE I KNOW SO MUCH ABOUT SWORD TESTING?

JUST AS YOU KILLED YOUR OWN FATHER...

I, TOO, KILLED *MY OWN* FATHER!

MY FATHER...

...HE MADE ME TEST A SWORD ON HIM SO I COULD MASTER THE DEEPEST SECRETS OF THE YAMADA SCHOOL.

AT THAT MOMENT, HE HAD ALREADY CUT OPEN HIS STOMACH...

THE COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE UNDERSTOOD ME TO BE HIS *KAISHAKU.*

AND THERE WAS *NO* FURTHER INVESTIGATION...

BUT MY FATHER HAD COMMITTED *SEPPUKU* TO ALLOW ME TO TEST A SWORD ON HIM...

...AND TO PREVENT ME FROM BEING SUSPECTED OF *MURDER.*

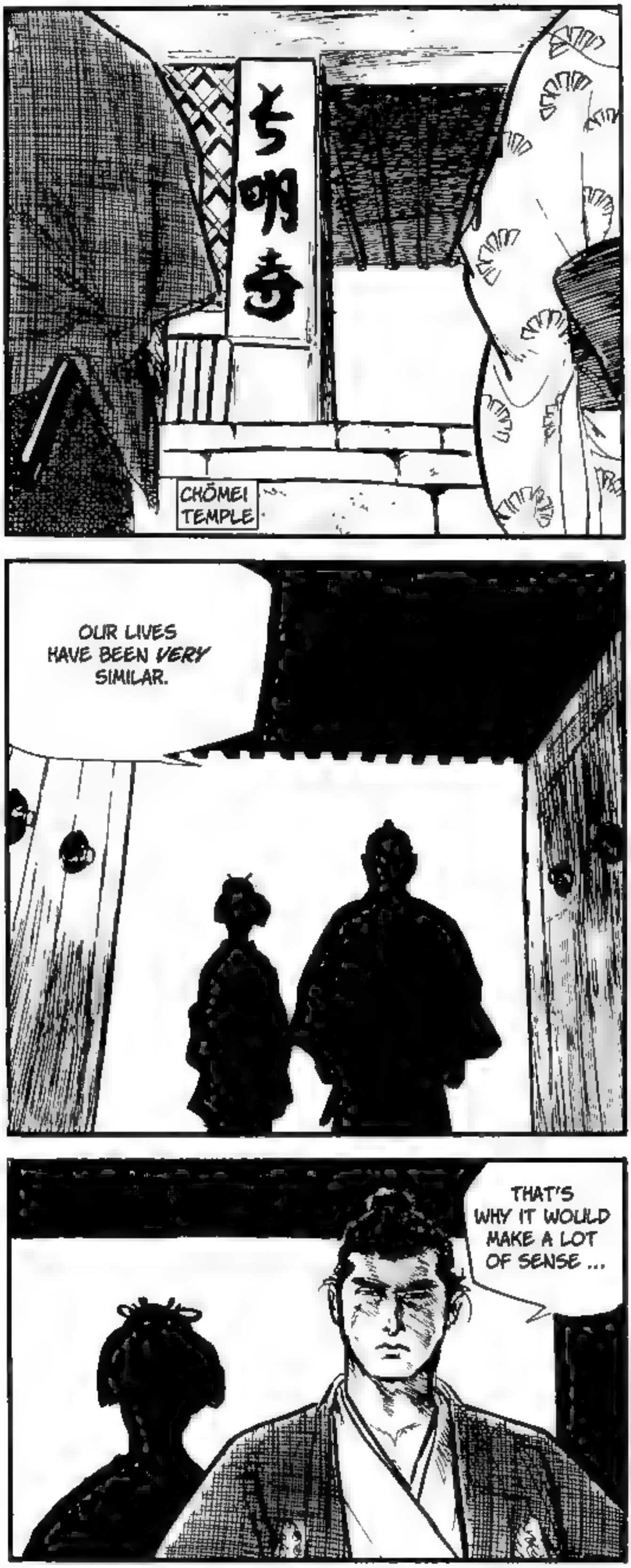
HE DID IT ALL FOR *ME.*

THERE IS NO DOUBT...
...THAT I KILLED MY FATHER.
SINCE I TOO WAS BORN INTO A SWORD-TESTING FAMILY, EVERY DAY OF MY CHILDHOOD WAS FULL OF HORRORS BEYOND DESCRIPTION.

ONE NIGHT I SLEPT BESIDE A *HEADLESS CORPSE*...

WHEN I WOKE UP, THERE WOULD BE A *SEVERED HEAD* LYING BESIDE MY PILLOW AGAIN AND AGAIN...

MY FATHER WAS *TRAINING* ME NOT TO FEAR BLOOD AND CORPSES.


CHŌMEI TEMPLE
OUR LIVES HAVE BEEN *VERY* SIMILAR.
THAT'S WHY IT WOULD MAKE A LOT OF SENSE ...

TO WALK THE SAME PATH TOGETHER... HAND IN HAND.
THIS IS THE YAMANO FAMILY'S FAMILY TEMPLE.

AFTER A SWORD TEST, MY FATHER WOULD COME TO THIS TEMPLE AND PRAY FOR THE SLAIN...

...HERE.

BEHIND CHŌMEI IS *HELL VALLEY.* NO ONE HAS EVER GONE THERE.

I PUSHED MY FATHER DOWN FROM *HERE!*

WHEN I HEARD THE NEWS FROM INAO-*SAMA*, I INTENDED TO SHOW YOU THIS PLACE.

IT'S BECAUSE I THOUGHT THAT I WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO LEARN THE *REAL* REASON YOU SAY YOU WANT TO MARRY ME IF I ASKED YOU ANYWHERE ELSE.

I UNDERSTAND *EVERYTHING* YOU'VE BEEN SAYING UP UNTIL NOW. WE INDEED *ARE* TWO OF A KIND.

BUT I *ALSO* UNDERSTAND THAT YOU DON'T REALLY INTEND TO MARRY ME.

THIS IS WHERE I KILLED MY FATHER.

I HAVE COMMITTED A *TERRIBLE* CRIME THAT I HAVE CONFESSED TO ONLY ONE PERSON IN MY ENTIRE LIFE—YOU, YAMADA-*SAMA*.

WHY WOULD YOU WANT TO MARRY ME, KNOWING THAT I AM GUILTY OF MURDERING MY FATHER?

PLEASE TELL ME THE TRUTH!

YOU SAID THAT IF I BECAME YOUR WIFE, I COULD NEVER PAINT AGAIN...

...BUT *WHY*?!

...

...

PLEASE TELL ME!

WHAT DO YOU *REALLY* THINK?!

IF YOU'RE GOING TO GO *THAT* FAR...

...I'LL *TELL* YOU!

THERE ARE TIMES WHEN BLOOD CAN LOOK *SO* BEAUTIFUL.

THE SIGHT OF A MAN WHO DIES BY THE SWORD IS MORE BEAUTIFUL THAN *ANYTHING* SHOULD BE IN THIS WORLD.

THAT'S *NATURAL* IF YOU GROW UP ACCUSTOMED TO BLOODSHED.

IN THIS WORLD, THERE'S NOTHING AS FLEETING AS HUMAN LIFE. AND I THINK THERE'S NOTHING AS BEAUTIFUL AS THE MOMENT WHEN LIFE ENDS.

MEN ONLY HAVE THREE THINGS: BIRTH, LIFE, AND DEATH.

IF YOU GROW UP SEEING ONLY DEATH, THAT'S HOW IT SEEMS.

THAT'S THE WAY I WAS.

I PROGRESSED FROM OBSERVING... TO KILLING.

ON THOSE DAYS WHEN I KILLED SOMEONE AND SAW THEIR BLOOD, I FELT A THRILL THAT RAN THROUGH EVERY FIBER OF MY BODY... DOWN TO THE BOTTOM OF MY SOUL.

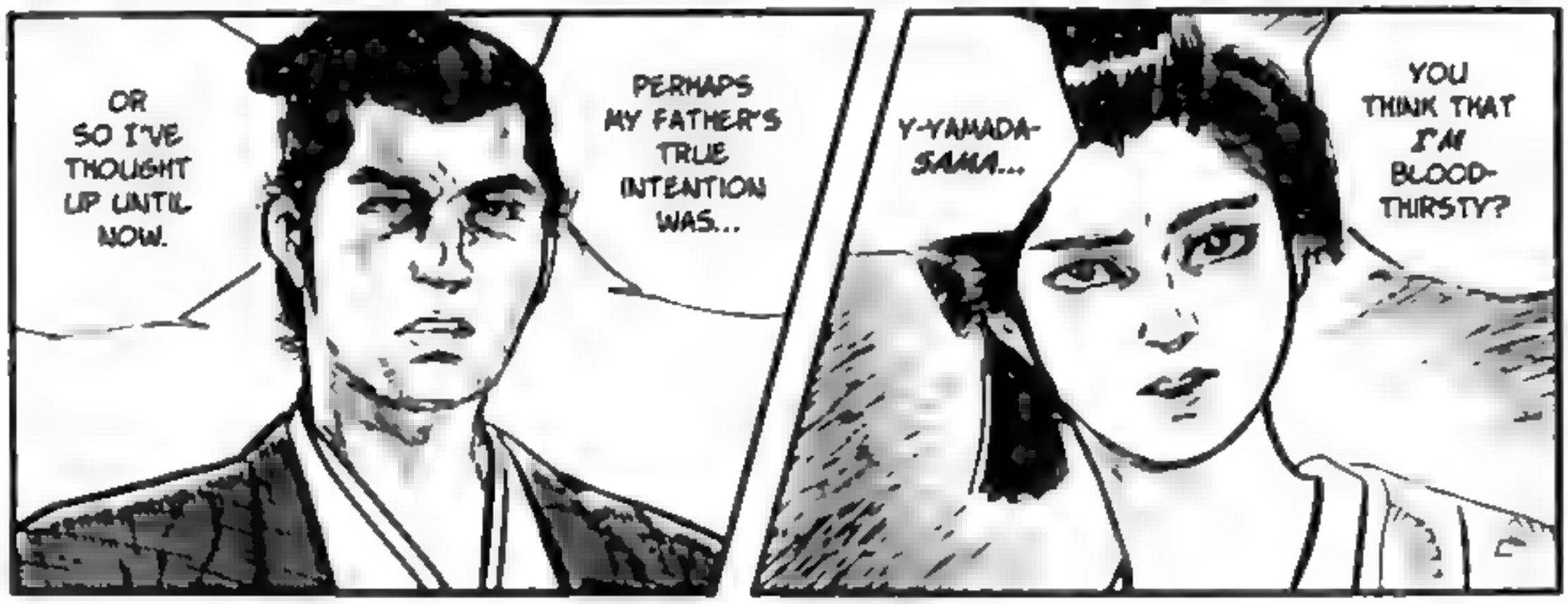
ON OTHER DAYS, I FELT DEPRESSED AND HURT.

WHEN I HIT ROCK BOTTOM, I WOULD BECOME MAD FOR BLOOD.

AND WHEN I DID...

I KILLED MY FATHER.

MY FATHER KNEW THAT I WOULD END UP BECOMING BLOODTHIRSTY. THAT WAS WHY HE MADE ME TEST A SWORD ON HIM...


OR SO I'VE THOUGHT UP UNTIL NOW.
PERHAPS MY FATHER'S TRUE INTENTION WAS...
Y-YAMADA-SAMA...
YOU THINK THAT I'M BLOOD-THIRSTY?

YES! YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO HURT YOURSELF TO PAINT WITH YOUR OWN BLOOD! YOU COULD HAVE BROUGHT YOUR *OWN* INK INSTEAD!

AND THEN THERE'S THAT *STRANGE* LOOK IN YOUR EYES WHENEVER YOU LOOK AT BLOOD!

IF YOU WERE TELLING ME THE TRUTH, THEN YOU'D WANT TO EXPRESS THE VALUE OF LIFE BECAUSE OF YOUR PASSION AS AN ARTIST.

BUT APART FROM THAT, YOU WANT TO SEE BLOOD FLOW. YOU CAN'T DENY YOUR TWISTED NATURE! YOU *WANT* TO SEE PEOPLE DIE!

S-SO...

DO YOU WANT TO MARRY ME OUT OF *PITY*?!

I SEE THE OLD ME IN YOU.

I AM THE *ONLY* PERSON IN THE WORLD WHO COULD POSSIBLY STRAIGHTEN YOU OUT. I WANT TO SHARE MY LIFE WITH YOU BECAUSE I FEEL A BOND WITH YOU. WE'VE BOTH CRAVED BLOOD.

IT'S SAID THAT A HUSBAND AND WIFE MUST BE AS ONE. IF THAT'S TRUE, THEN NO ONE COULD UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER AS WELL AS WE COULD.

WE ARE PARTNERS IN THE TRUE SENSE OF THE WORD.

Y- YAMADA-*SAMA*...

OH..

I *SWORE* THAT I WOULD FOREVER BE ALONE! I COULDN'T LET MY CHILD LIVE A LIFE LIKE YOURS OR MINE...

BUT I'VE BEEN RECONSIDERING...BECAUSE WE THINK THE SAME WAY...BECAUSE WE BOTH KNOW HOW IMPORTANT LIFE IS...IF WE CAN PASS THAT ON TO OUR CHILD...THEN THE SECOND, THIRD, OR FOURTH GENERATION MIGHT SUCCEED WHERE THE FIRST FAILED.

IN TODAY'S WORLD, WE'RE TAUGHT TO REGARD HUMAN LIFE LIGHTLY. THE STATE PUNISHES FOR THE SAKE OF RETRIBUTION.

AND THE PEOPLE JUST GO ALONG WITH THIS! AT LEAST YOU AND I OR OUR CHILD WILL KNOW BETTER...

P-PLEASE STOP IT!

I-I'M NOT GOOD ENOUGH...

THEY AREN'T ENOUGH FOR ME ANYMORE...I'VE BEEN TRYING TO RATIONALIZE THEM...

I WANT TO SEE *BLOOD*. I WANT TO SEE PEOPLE *DIE*...

THAT MAKES MY BODY TINGLE *ALL OVER*...

I WANT TO SEE THE MOMENT OF *DEATH*.

TH-THAT'S MY *ONLY* REASON TO LIVE! TH-*THAT'S* WHY I REMEMBER WHEN I WAS YOUNG... AND PAINT THOSE HELLISH PICTURES...

I WANTED TO SEE YOU BEHEAD SOMEONE... THAT WAS ALL I WANTED...

Y-YAMADA-*SAMA*, IF YOU INVITED ME HERE...

...KNOWING ALL THAT...

YOU MEANT TO PUSH ME DOWN...JUST LIKE YOU DID TO YOUR FATHER.

I-IF YOU KNEW THAT, TH-THEN WHY DID YOU BRING ME HERE...?

KAN'EMON-*DONO* KNEW THAT HE COULDN'T ESCAPE FROM THE LAW. IT SEEMS THAT *HE* TOOK YOU HERE...

HE *KNEW* WHAT WOULD HAPPEN TO YOU.

THAT'S WHY HE BROUGHT YOU HERE. HE HOPED TO DIE TOGETHER WITH YOU... HE ALREADY KNEW THAT YOU THIRSTED FOR BLOOD.

HE COULDN'T BE RESPONSIBLE FOR RAISING THAT KIND OF DAUGHTER.

Y-YOU EVEN KNEW *THAT*?!

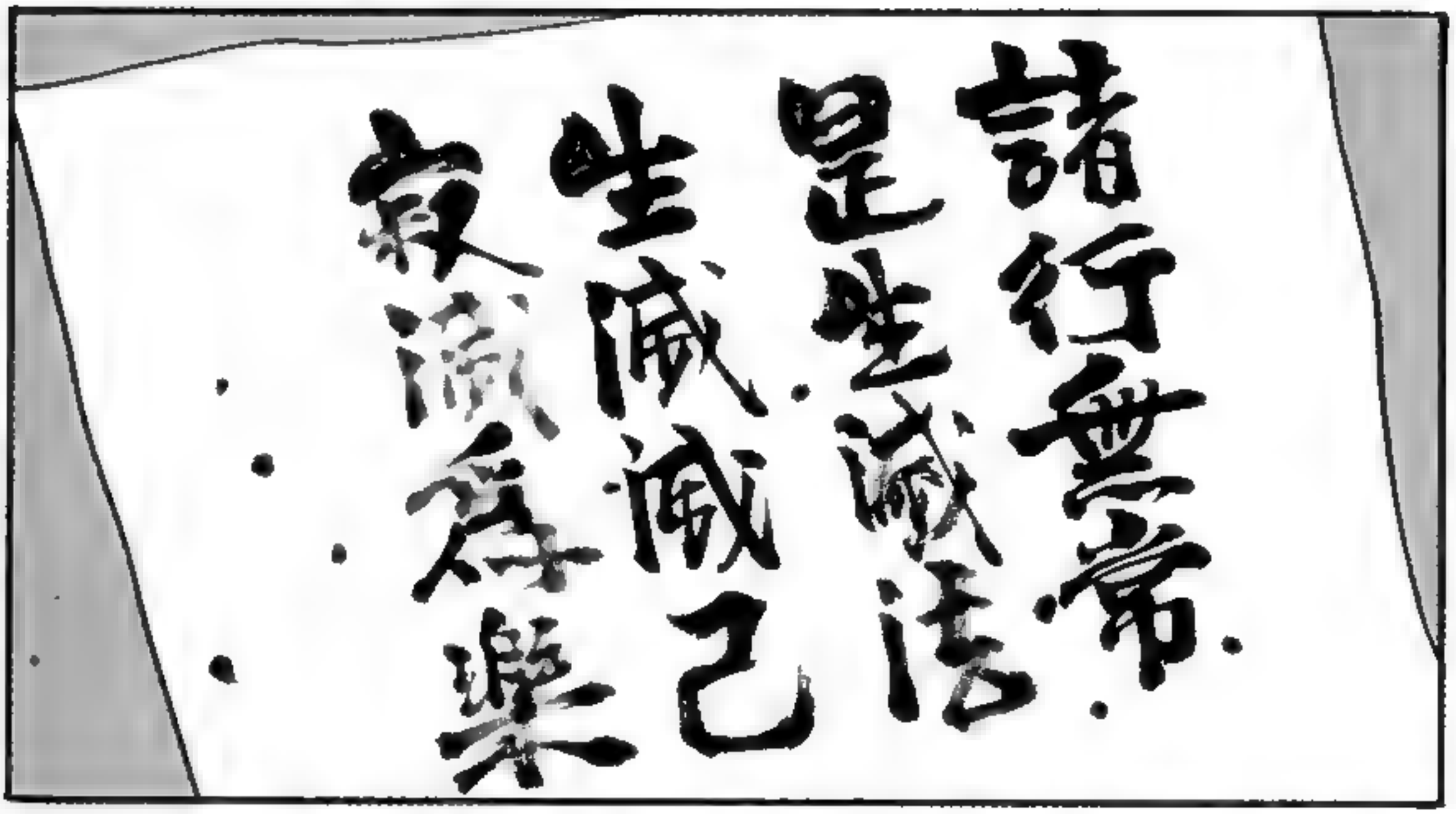
EVEN THAT...?

YOU HELPED YOUR FATHER KILL PEOPLE IN THE STREETS AND HAUL THEIR CORPSES, DIDN'T YOU?

YOU SAW RIGHT *THROUGH* ME...AND YOU *STILL WANT* TO MARRY ME...

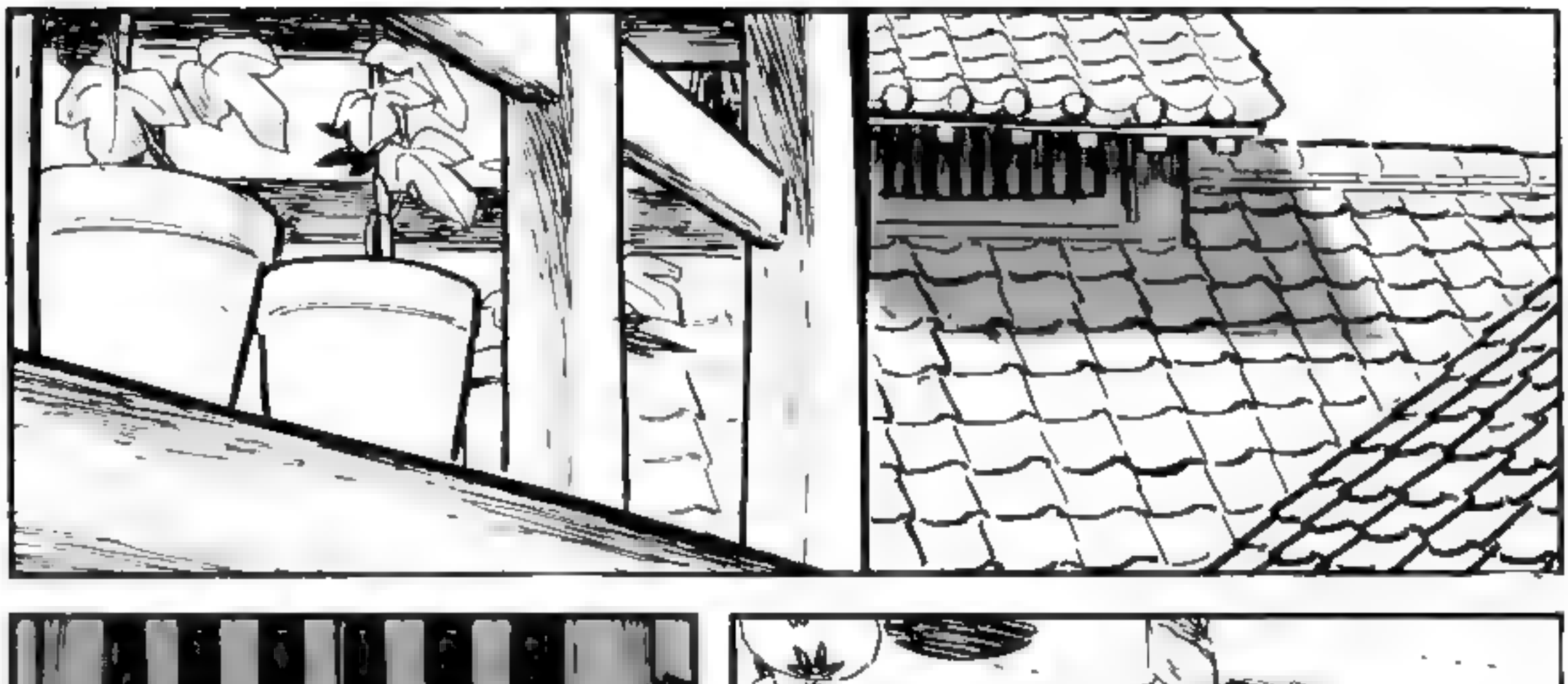
SH-SHE LOOKED DETERMINED...

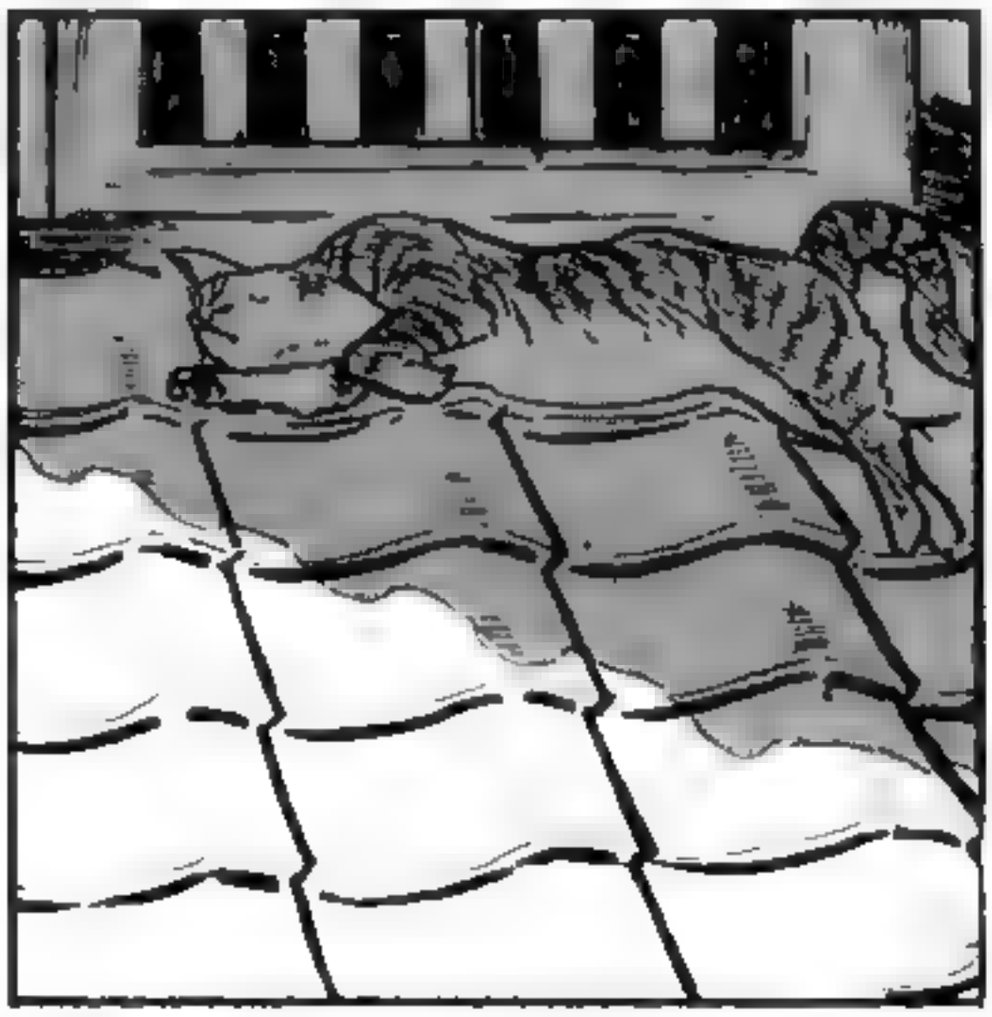
BUT SHE DIDN'T SAY WHERE SHE WAS GOING...


諸行無常
是生滅法
生滅滅已
寂滅爲樂

the fourteenth

The Season of New Straw

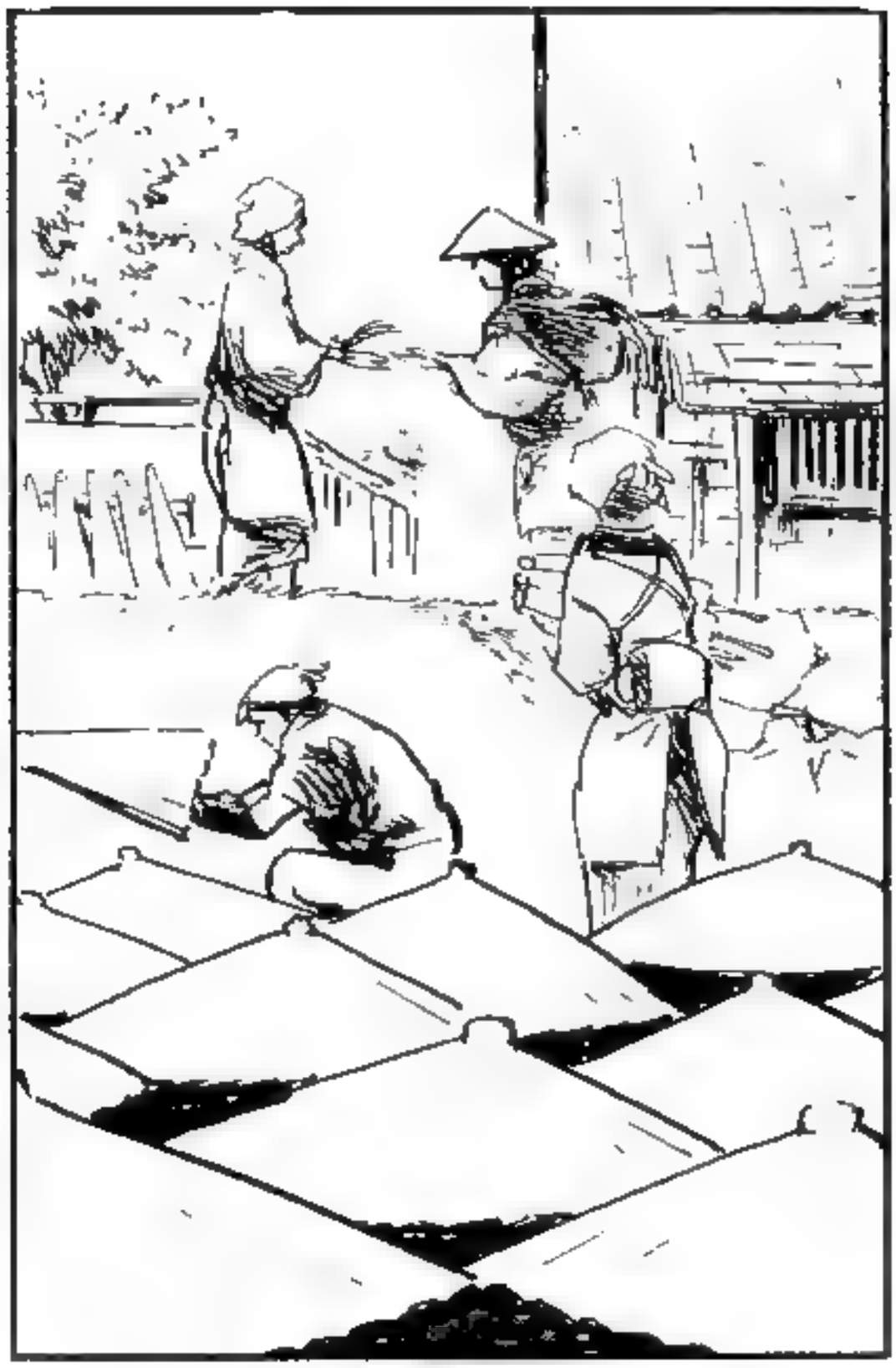




NEW STRAAAW ...
I GOT SOME NEW STRAAAW ...

ANYBODY NEED SOME NEW STRAAAW ...?

NEW STRAAAW...
ANYBODY NEED ANY?



NEW STRAW
NEW STRAW

NEW STRAAW

NEW STRAAAW...

ANYBODY NEED SOME NEW STRAAAW...?

NEW STRAAAW...

ANYBODY NEED SOME NEW STRAAAW...?
NEW STRAAAW...

I SEPARATE THE ROOTS BEFORE PLANTING AND I PULL OUT THE STALKS DURING PLANTING. THE RICE THAT'S LEFT BEHIND GROWS UNDISTURBED IN ITS ORIGINAL FIELD.
I DO MY BEST TO GROW MY STRAW—TO CUT IT WHEN IT GETS A LITTLE LONG—AND TO DRY IT SO IT CAN BECOME THIS NEW STRAW.
UH HUH.

IT'S SAID THAT STRAW IN YOUR HAIR IS GOOD FOR THE BLOOD CIRCULATION IN YOUR HEAD.

GEISHA AND OTHER WOMEN COMPETE TO SEE WHO CAN BE THE FIRST TO WEAR NEW STRAW.

A LOT OF FAMILIES WRAP UP NEW STRAW AND HANG IT FROM THE CEILING SO THAT THE WOMEN DON'T RUN OUT OF IT.

SO THEY SAY IT IMPROVES BLOOD CIRCU-LATION...?

YES.

THERE ARE NO WOMEN IN MY HOUSE, SO EVEN THOUGH I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT THE APPEAL OF NEW STRAW IS...

...COULD YOU GIVE ME SOME?

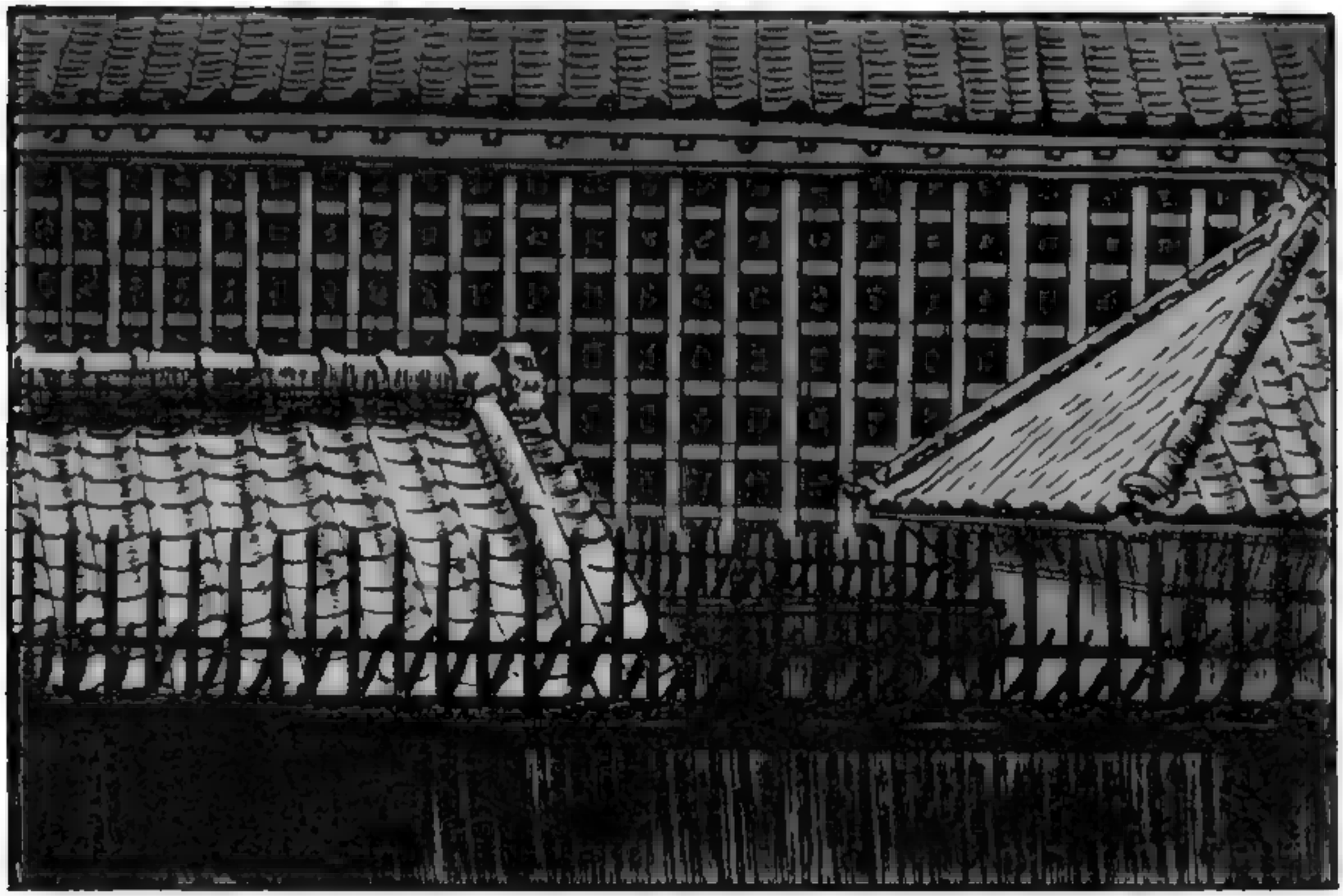
GASP! *YOU*...A SAMURAI?!

I KNOW IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE. I DON'T NEED IT, BUT...

OH!

IT'S FOR SOMEBODY ELSE! FOR YOUR *SPECIAL SOMEONE!*

NEW STRAAAW...
ANYBODY NEED SOME NEW STRAAAW...?



EEEKU
OO

AAAH!
NOOO!

DAMN!
DON'T KILL MEEE!

I DON'T WANNA DIE...
NOOO!

H-H-
HEEELP
MEEE!

NOOO!
NOOO! NOOO! HAVE
MERCY ON
ME!

EEEE

AAAH!

TAKE THE PAPER OFF HER FACE.

AAAH!

NOOO!

A WOMAN'S LIFE *MUST* BE BEAUTIFUL.

SINCE YOU WERE SAID TO BE THE MOST BEAUTIFUL PROSTITUTE IN FUKAGAWA, YOU SHOULD WEAR THIS IN YOUR HAIR.

N-NEW STRAW...

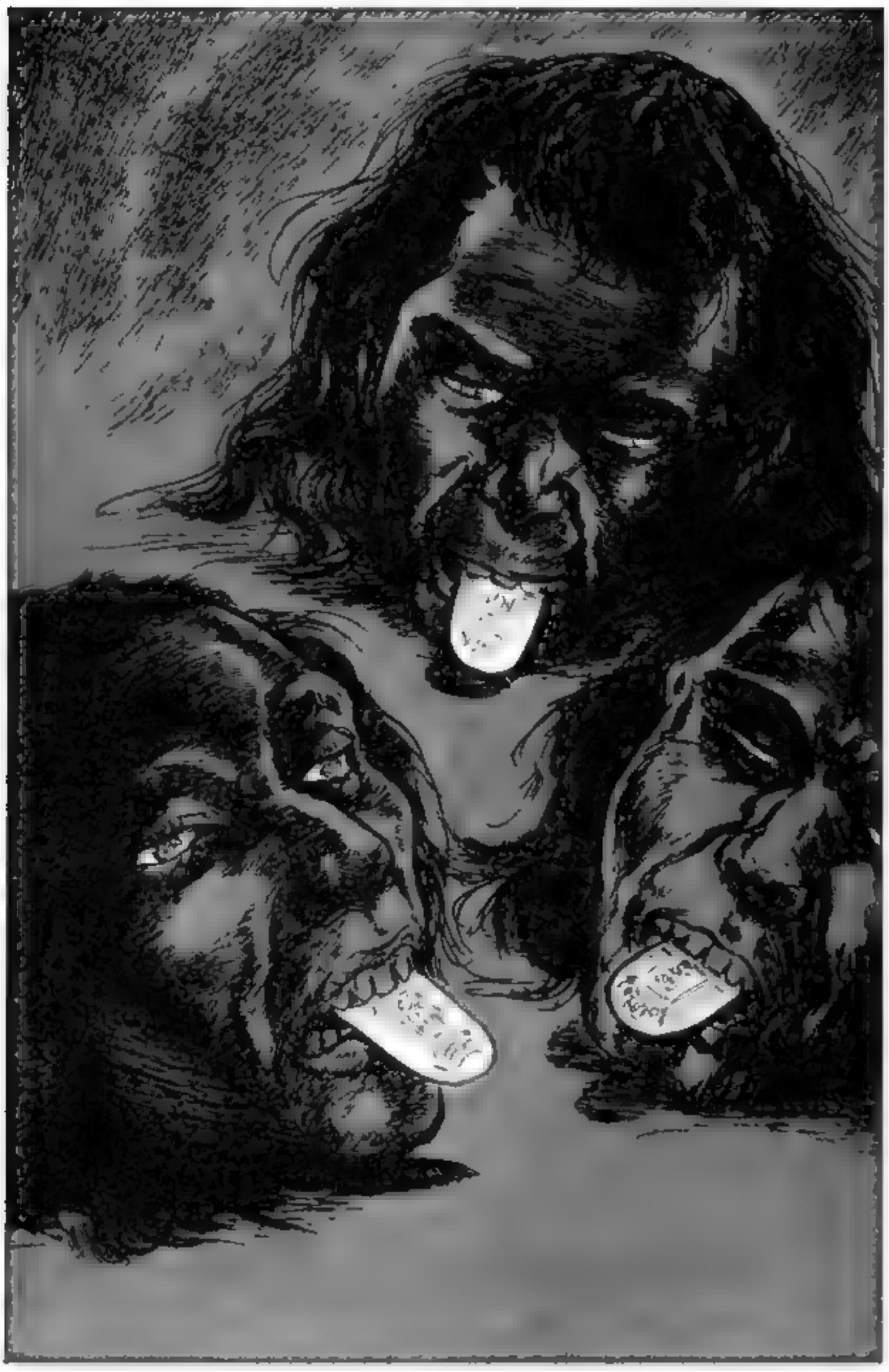
GO AHEAD.

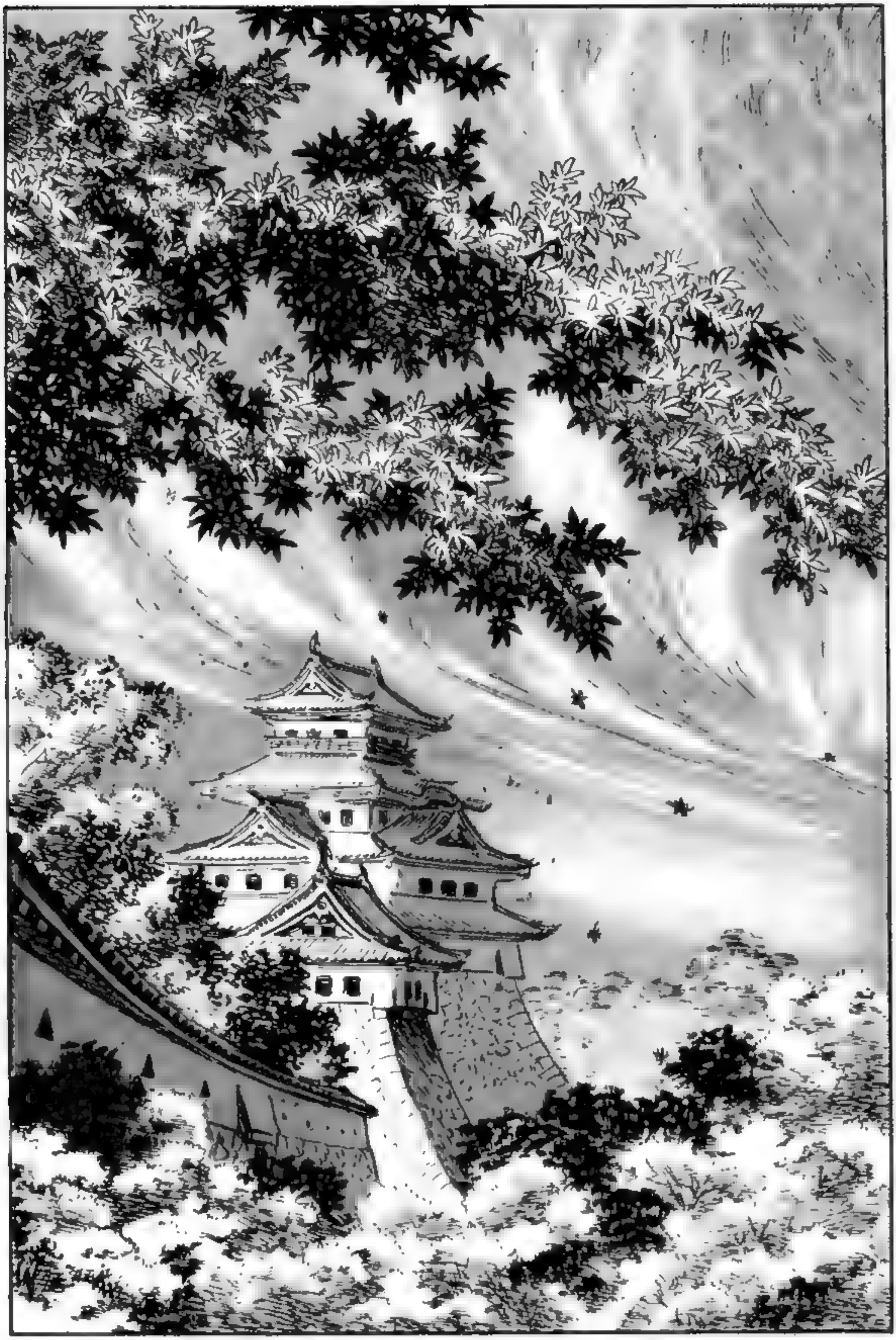
S-SIR... YOU BROUGHT *THIS*...FOR *ME*?

BSHHH!!

the fifteenth

The "Set-up"





WHAT ARE YOU SAYING? YOU WANT TO *STOP* THE EXECUTIONS? I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU'RE SAYING THAT, ŌKUBO-*SAMA*.

WE CAN'T TAKE THE PUNISHMENTS MANDATED BY LAW *LIGHTLY*...

WAIT.

I'M NOT SAYING THAT ANY OF THIS HAS TO BE MADE *PUBLIC*. I TOLD YOU THAT THIS IS ONLY A *DISCUSSION*.

E-EVEN SO... SUPPOSE THAT WE STOP EXECUTIONS FOR JUST A *MOMENT*... THAT'S NOT FOR *US* TO DECIDE. IT'S TOO IMPORTANT...

THAT'S WHY WE HAVE TO KEEP THIS *PRIVATE*.

ONLY JUNIOR COUNCILOR NAITŌ,...

...YOU, AND I WILL KNOW.

INOUE-*DONO*, HOW MUCH DOES A DECAPITATION COST?

YOU SHOULD KNOW.

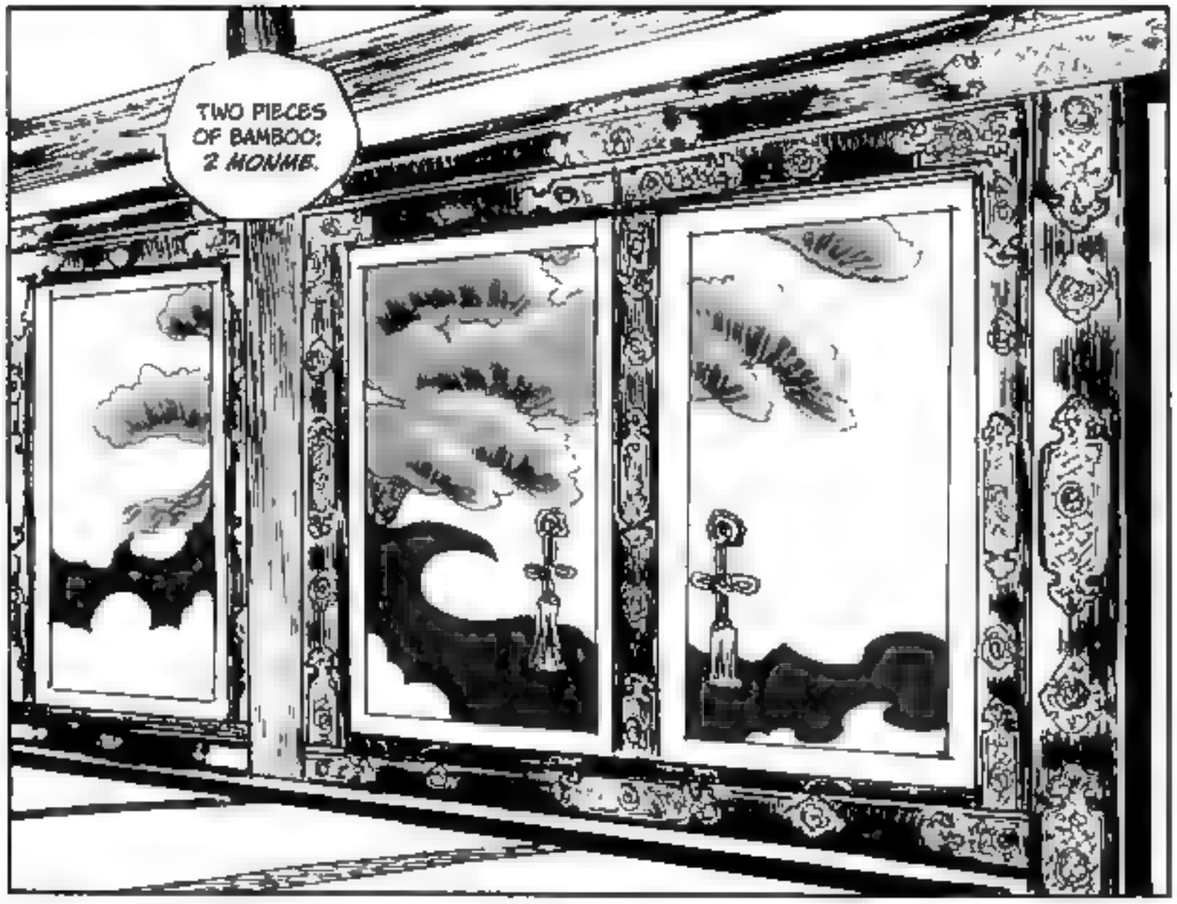
...
...

PERHAPS YOU NEVER PAID *ANY* ATTENTION TO SUCH MATTERS.

SO LISTEN CAREFULLY TO WHAT I'M ABOUT TO TELL YOU.

20 STRAW MATS:
11 *MONME*, 4 *FUN*.
25 BORDERED MATS:
73 MONME, *7 FUN*, 5 *RIN*.
15 LOADS OF SAND:
10 *MONME*, 5 *FUN*...

ONE HOE:
5 *MONME*, 4 *FUN*, 3 *RIN*.
MEALS FOR FIFTEEN:
23 MONME, 5 *FUN*.


TWO PIECES OF BAMBOO: 2 MONME.

ONE HUNDRED SEWING THREADS: 1 MONME.
FIVE MORTARS: 15 MONME.

ONE GRINDSTONE: 3 MONME, 4 FUN, 1 RIN.
ONE MALLET: 4 MONME, 1 FUN, 5 RIN.

ONE SAND STRAINER: 2 MONME.
ONE INKSTONE BOX: 4 FUN, 1 RIN.

TWO FOUR-*TO* BARRELS: 1 *MONME*, 5 *FUN*. ONE

ONE BUCKET: SIX *MONME*...

AND THEN TWO *FUN* FOR YAMADA ASAEMON'S POLISHING FEES.

IT ALL ADDS UP TO 3 *RYŌ*, *FUN* IN GOLD AND 4 *MONME*, 2 *FUN*, AND 5 *RIN* IN SILVER.

UP TO THE END OF LAST MONTH THIS YEAR, A STAGGERING *276 PEOPLE* WERE BEHEADED.

IF YOU MULTIPLY THE FIGURE I JUST GAVE YOU OF 3 *RYO*, 2 *FUN* IN GOLD AND 4 *MONME*, 2 *FUN*, AND 5 *RIN* IN SILVER, YOU CAN IMAGINE THE *ENORMOUS* AMOUNTS OF MONEY BEING SPENT ON EXECUTIONS.

IF YOU INCLUDE THE CRUCIFIED, THE NUMBER OF EXECUTED CRIMINALS UP TO LAST MONTH GOES UP TO AN *ASTOUNDING* 1,046!

OHHH...

GOVERNMENT FINANCES ARE *EXTREMELY* TIGHT, AND MOREOVER, THE PRICES OF EVERYTHING ARE GOING UP AT *EXTRAORDINARY* RATES...

THIS IS A TIME WHEN WE HAVE TO CUT DOWN ON WASTEFUL EXPENSES IN *ALL* AREAS AND ECONOMIZE.

I SUGGEST THAT WE THINK ABOUT ALL THE THOUSANDS OF *RYO* NOW BEING SPENT ON CRIMINALS GOING TO THEIR DEATHS!

W-WELL, YES, BUT PUNISHMENTS ARE A FORM OF *PREVENTION*. THEY'RE MEANT TO SHOW THE *CONSEQUENCES* OF CRIME.

IF WE *STOP* EXECUTING CRIMINALS, THIS EFFECT WILL BE *LOST*, AND I AM TERRIBLY WORRIED THAT WE WILL NOT BE ABLE TO MAINTAIN ORDER ANYMORE.

YOU SAY THAT EXECUTIONS ARE A USEFUL FORM OF PREVENTION...

BUT I DON'T THINK THEY'RE *THAT* EFFECTIVE, BECAUSE THE NUMBER OF THE CONDEMNED KEEPS GOING UP *EVERY YEAR.*

AND BEHEADINGS TAKE PLACE ON THE PRISON GROUNDS.

KK KK KK

THE PUBLIC DOESN'T EVEN SEE THEM.

KK KK KK

WHY DON'T WE LEAVE THE CRUCIFIXIONS ALONE FOR NOW...

KK KK

AND TRY NOT TO HAVE ANY BEHEADINGS FOR A COUPLE OF MONTHS?

THAT SHOULDN'T BE TOO HARD FOR THE TOWN COMMISSIONER.

EVEN IF THE NUMBER OF PRISONERS INCREASES AT TENMA PRISON, ISN'T THERE A WAY TO KEEP THEIR NUMBERS DOWN CALLED THE "*SET-UP*"?

THE "SET-UP" WON'T COST US A SINGLE *MON*.

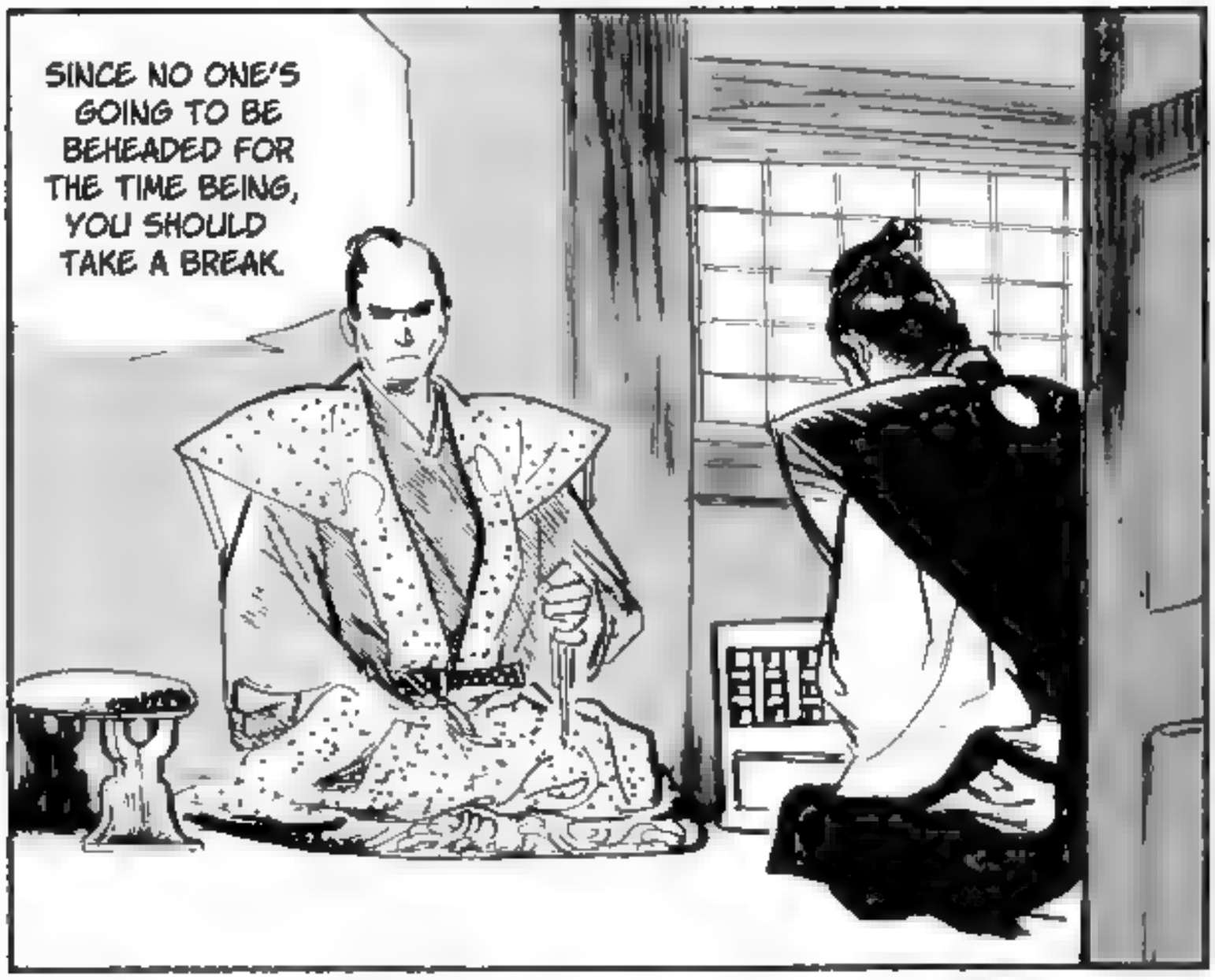
WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE IF THE CONDEMNED DIE IN PRISON RATHER THAN AT THE EXECUTION GROUNDS?

WHAT DO YOU THINK, NAITŌ-*SAMA*?

IT CAN'T BE HELPED! AND IF WE COULD SAVE TWO OR THREE THOUSAND *RYŌ*...

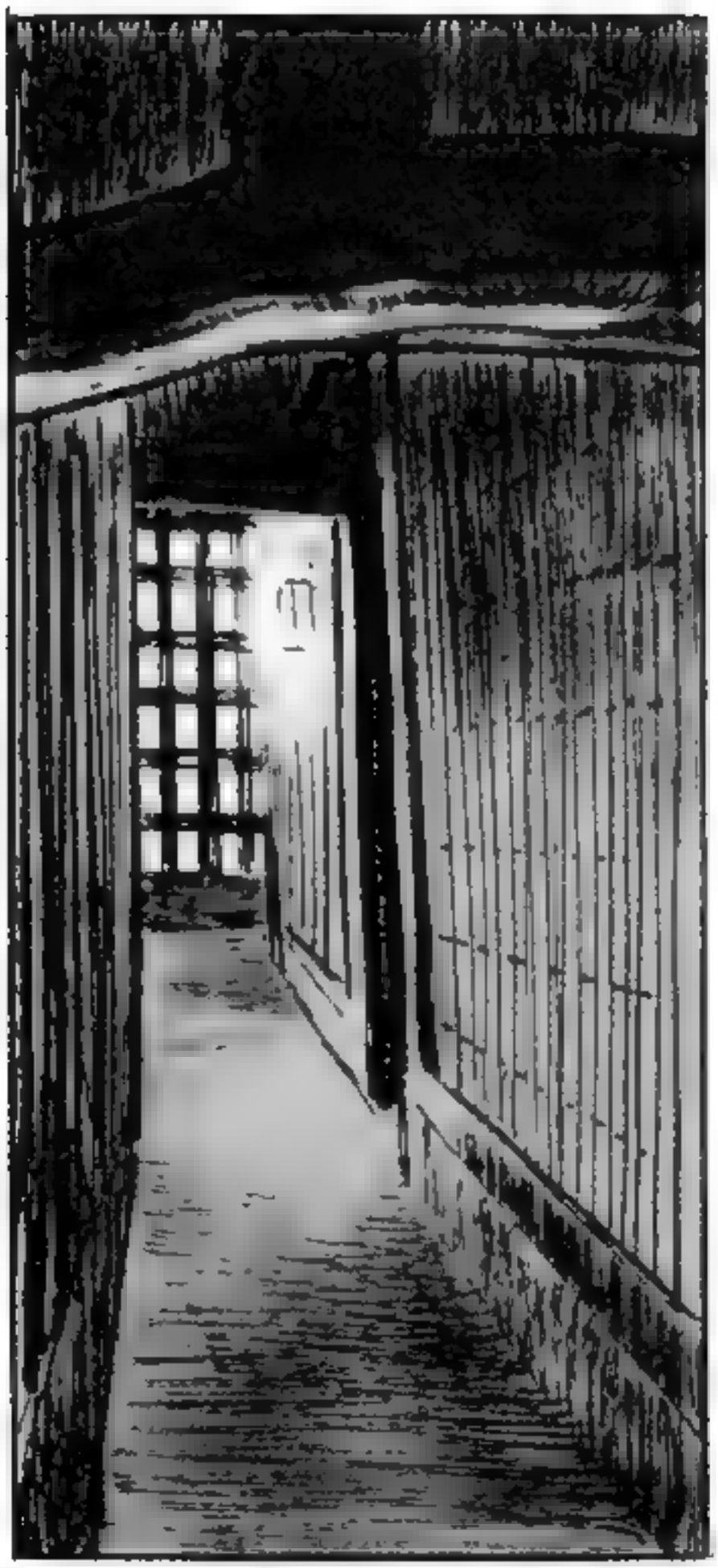
北町

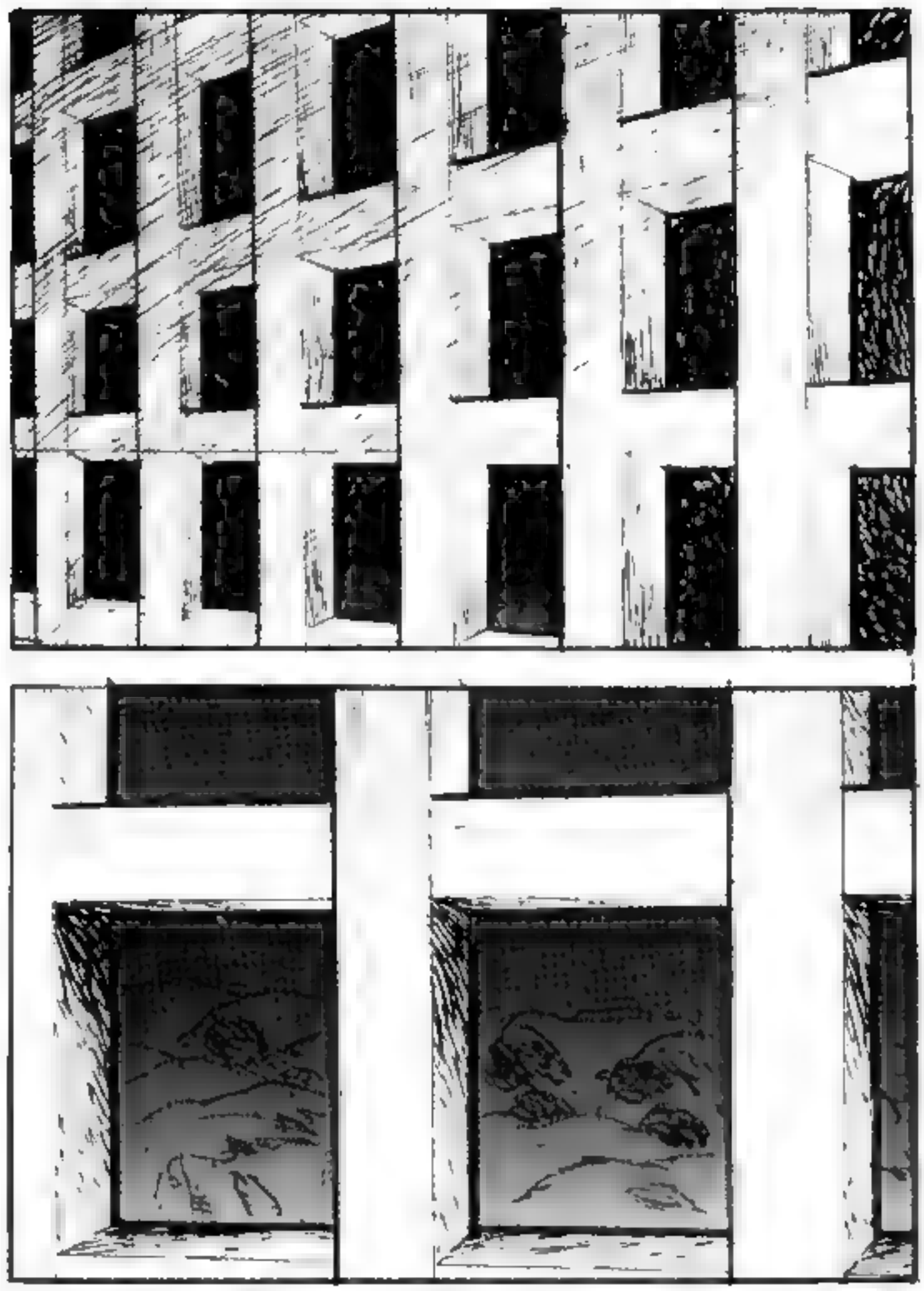
NORTH TOWN
COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE


SINCE NO ONE'S GOING TO BE BEHEADED FOR THE TIME BEING, YOU SHOULD TAKE A BREAK.

WHY?

YOU'RE NOT A VASSAL OF THE SHŌGUNATE. WE DON'T HAVE TO EXPLAIN ANYTHING TO *YOU*.
SO ANYWAY, JUST REST FOR A WHILE.





URSA

AARRGGHH!!

WHAT'RE YOU LOOKIN' AT?!
THIS IS THE "SET-UP"!

THE "SET-UP" DECREASED THE NUMBER OF PRISONERS BY KILLING THEM.

PRISON CHAMBERS HAD NO SET LIMITS ON THEIR CAPACITY. PRISONERS WERE ADMITTED AS LONG AS THERE WAS ANY SPACE AT ALL.

THE *RŌNANUSHI* HAD NO OBJECTIONS. AS A RESULT...

GHHH GHHH

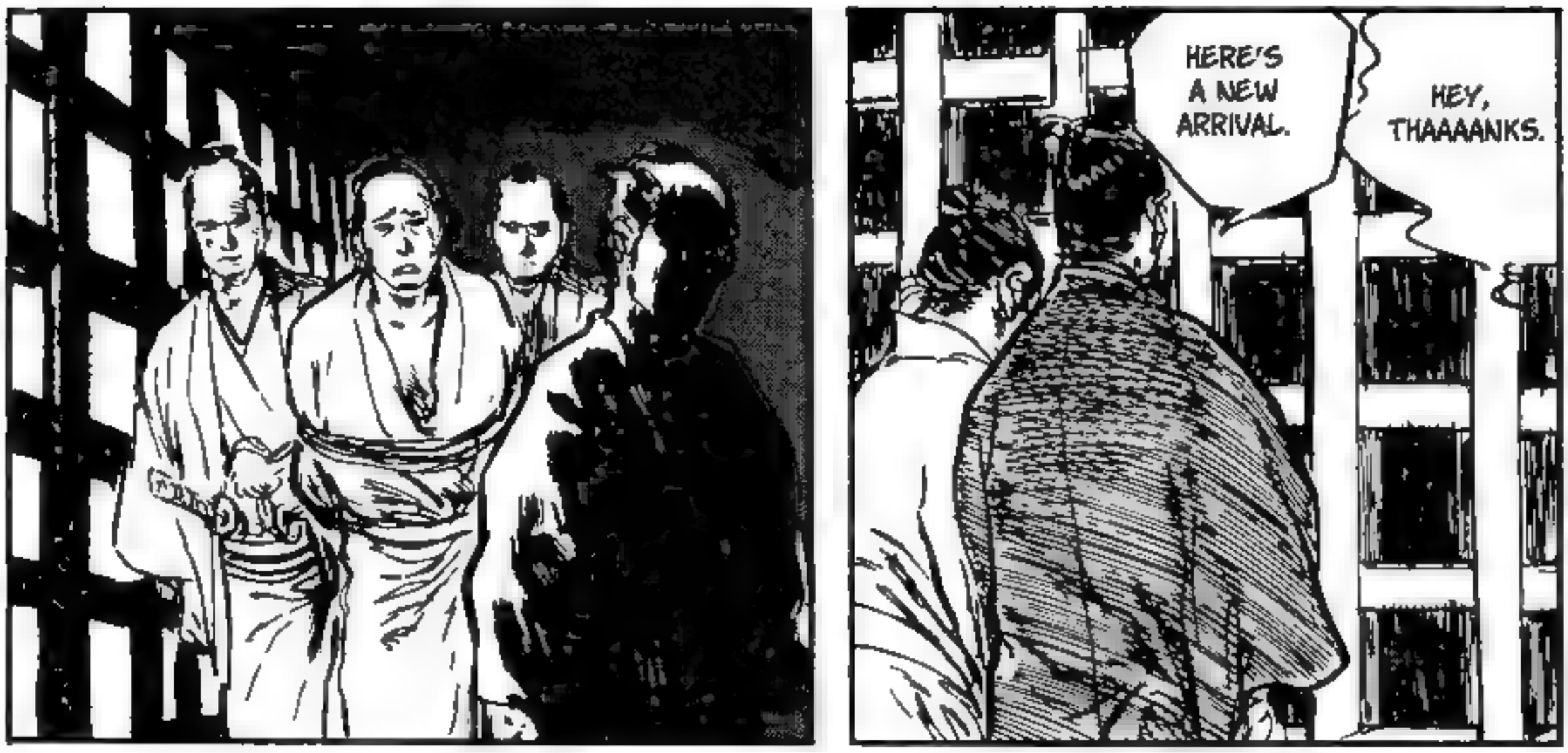
PRISONERS WERE "SET UP."

WHEN BEHEADINGS WERE PUT ON HOLD TO REDUCE EXPENSES, OF COURSE THE NUMBER OF INMATES GREATLY EXCEEDED THE CAPACITY OF THE PRISON AFTER JUST A LITTLE OVER TEN DAYS.

THE CROWDING WAS SO BAD THAT IF ONE NEW INMATE WAS ADMITTED, ONE HAD TO BE "SET UP." AND TWO NEW ARRIVALS MEANT THAT TWO HAD TO BE "SET UP."

HE DIED OF ILLNESS.

HERE YA GO.


HERE'S A NEW ARRIVAL.
HEY, THAAAANKS.

C'MON!
C'MON!
C'MON!
C'MON!

WAUMP!
HEY, YA DUMBASS FROM OUTSIDE! KEEP YER FRIGGIN' HEAD DOWN! I'M IN CHARGE HERE!
A DUMBASS LIKE YA WON'T BE STEALIN' OR BURNIN' NOTHIN' HERE! I'M THE BOSS, AN' YA BETTER DO WHAT I SAY!
Y-YES... SIR.
DIDJA BRING ANY MONEY?
Y-YES.
PIU
OKAY. GET THE BOARD AND TEACH 'IM A FINAL LESSON.

BANG!

BSHHH!

AAAARGH!

AAAARGH!

AAAARGH!

BSHH!

BANG!

AAAARGH!

I HEAR THERE'S ONE MORE COMIN' TOMORROW.

YEAH, TOO BAD.

AAAAH!
THE KEY TO THE "SET-UP" WAS STOMPING ON THE SCROTUM OF THE VICTIM
URRRRGH!
"CRUEL

AAAAAHH!

S-S-STOP IIIIT!

S-STOP IT!

H-H-HELLLLP!

I DON'T WANNA *DIIIIE!*

LEMME GOOOO!

H-HELLLLP!

DAAAAMN! I'M *NOT* GONNA LETCHA..

...SET *ME* UP!

AAAARGH!

IF YA WANNA DO IT, GO RIGHT AHEAD!

GSHHHH!

DSHH

HH!

GAAAAH!

URGH... OOH...

STUB-BORN, AIN'T YA?!

AAAARGH!

CHOMP!

AAAAH!

ARRRRGH!

E-EVERYBODY!

YOU'RE GONNA BE "SET UP" NEXT!

AAAAH!

H-HELP...

MEEEE...

S-STOP IT!

DAMMIT!

GSHHH!

URGH!

THUMP
THUMP

AAAAH!
GET 'IM!
WHY DO WE GOTTA BE "SET UP"? KILL 'IM!
ARRRRGH!

AAAAH!

ARRRRGH!

AAAAH!

DIZZ ZZZZ

KLING KLANG

MONEY!

H-HE SAVED UP *THIS* MUCH?!

IT WAS *NOTHIN'*. JUST A LITTLE TROUBLE.

GO BUY US SOME, SAKE.

HERE!

KLANG

YA CAN TAKE WHATEVER'S LEFT.

THAT'LL LAST YA TWO, THREE *YEARS*.

THEN CAN YA STICK SOME *SCISSORS* IN HERE?

TH- THAT'S *IMPOS-SIBLE*.

THERE'S A *LOTTA* GUYS IN HERE WHO WANNA CUT THEIR HAIR.

HERE, HAVE SOME MORE.

THUNK!

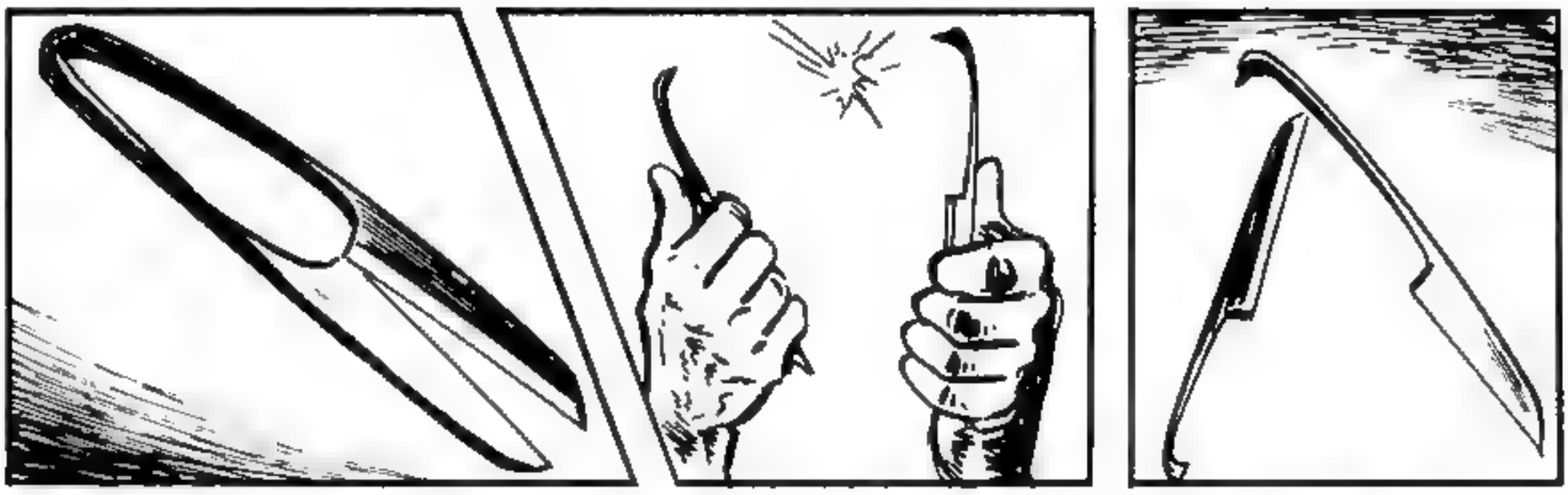
GLUB

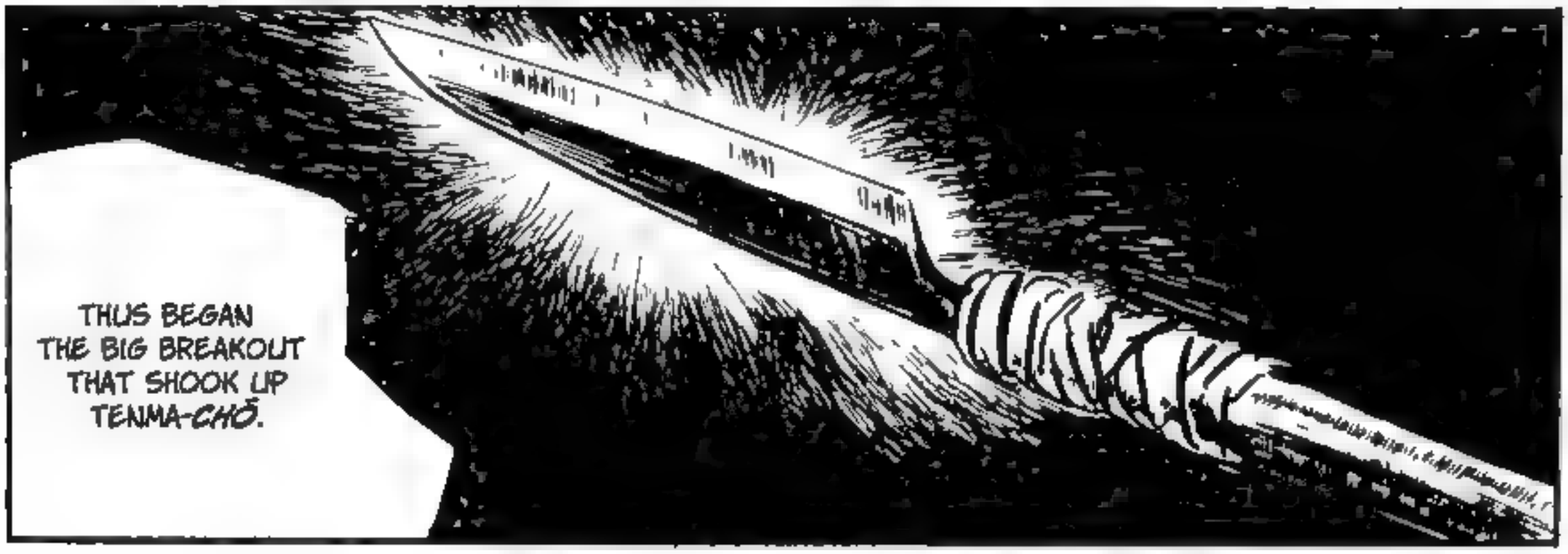
GLUB

THE MOUSE WAS ABOUT TO TURN ON THE CAT.

SOMETHING UNEXPECTED WAS ABOUT TO HAPPEN. DRIVEN BY FEAR... AND DRINKING *SAKE*...

THE PRISONERS WENT *BERSERK*. THEIR FEROCITY WAS BEYOND *ALL* MEASUREMENT.



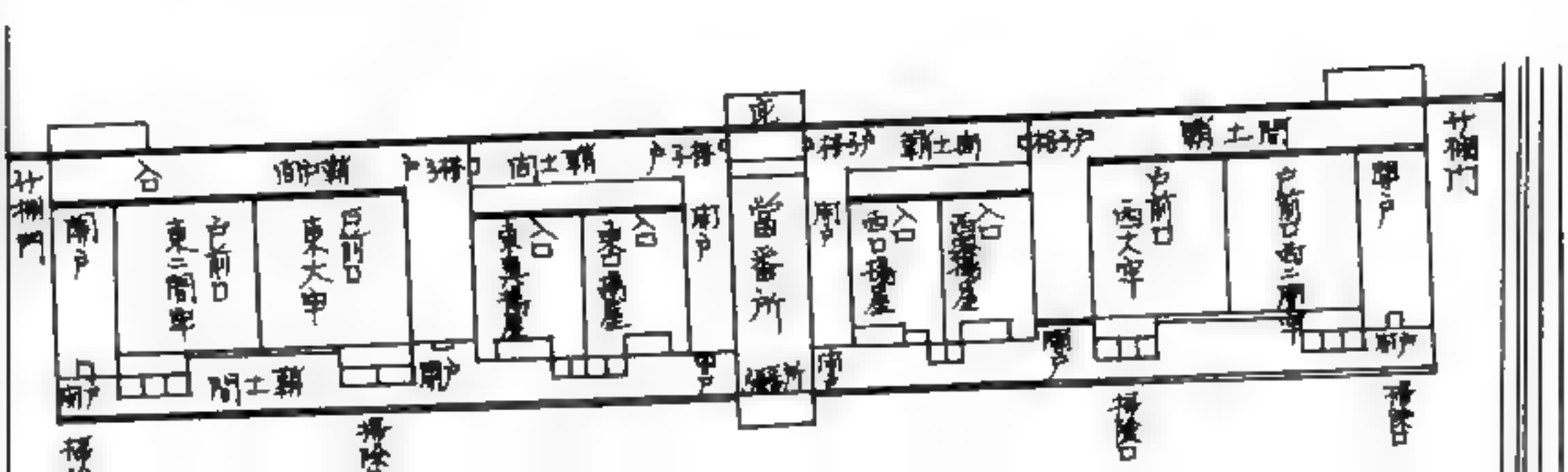

THUS BEGAN
THE BIG BREAKOUT
THAT SHOOK UP
TENMA-CHŌ.

THE PRISON IN TENMA-*CHŌ* OCCUPIED *2,677 TSUBO*. IT OCCUPIED ALMOST THE ENTIRE *CHŌ*.

THE BUILDING WAS DIVIDED INTO AN EASTERN AND A WESTERN WING.

EACH CONTAINED A LARGE CELL, ONE TWO-*KEN* CELLS, AND TWO *AGARIYA*.

AN OBSERVATION POST WAS LOCATED BETWEEN THE TWO WINGS.



DIRECTLY TO THE RIGHT OF THE OUTER GATE WERE ROOMS FOR CONSTABLES, AND IN THE CORNER AHEAD OF THEM WAS THE *BO-TSUBO* ROOM OF WARDEN ISHIDE.

TO THE EAST OF ISHIDE'S ROOM WERE THE RICE STOREHOUSE, THE RICE-POUNDING ROOM, AND THE RECORDS WAREHOUSE. TO THE WEST WAS THE KITCHEN.

ONE OF THE *AGARIYA* IN THE WEST WING WAS FOR FEMALE PRISONERS REGARDLESS OF STATUS.

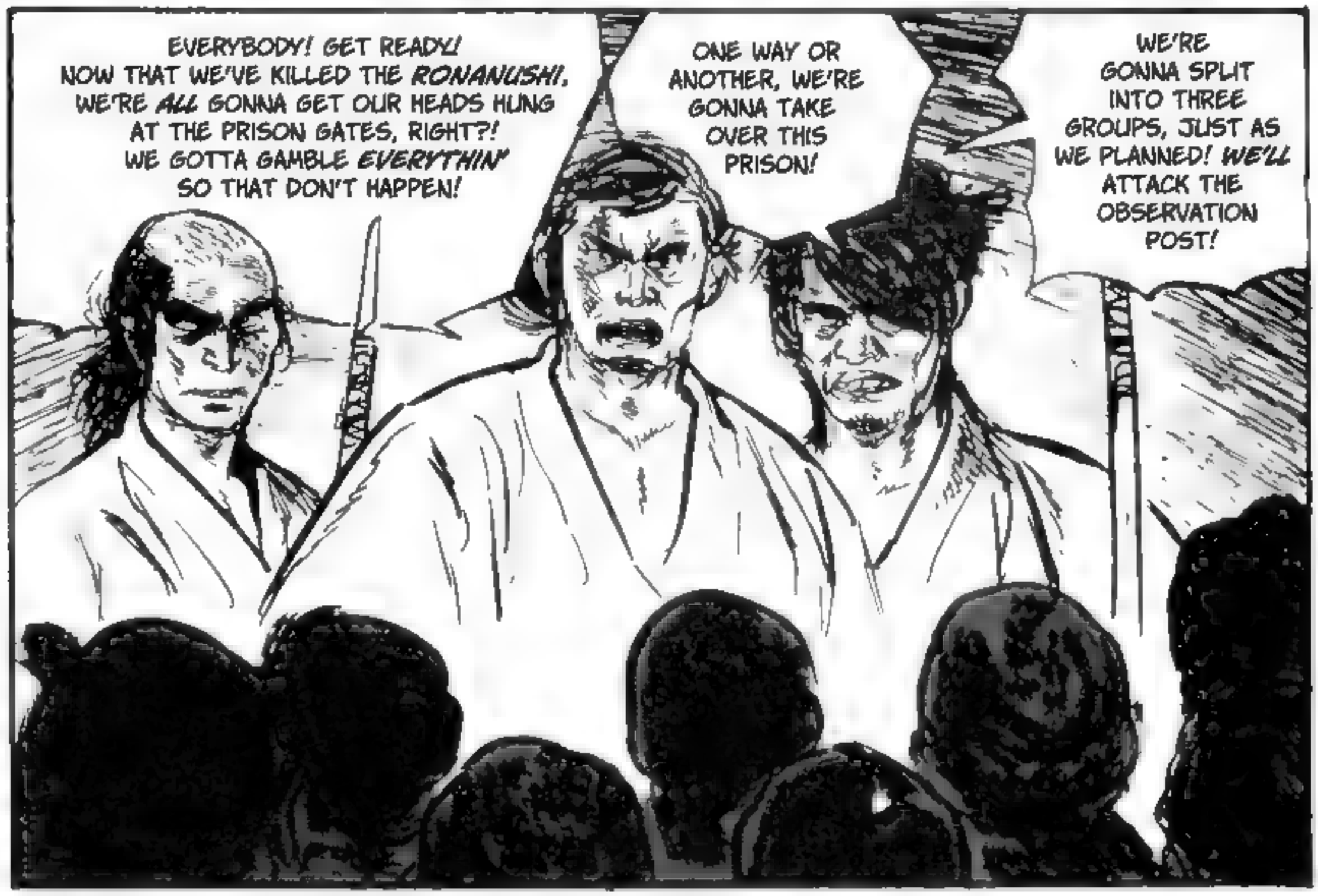
IT WAS ALSO CALLED THE "WOMEN'S ROOM."

UHHHH..
I-IT'S... THE... RŌNANUSHI...

URGH!
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!

GASP!
YA LOUSY DOCTOR...
ALWAYS GOIN' ALONG WITH THE "SET UP" FOR JUST A GOLD COIN AND LYIN', SAYIN' WE'RE DYIN' 'CAUSE WE'RE "SICK"...

THUNK!
YA SCREWED OUR BUDDIES! NOW YOU DIE!


EVERYBODY! GET READY! NOW THAT WE'VE KILLED THE RONANUSHI, WE'RE ALL GONNA GET OUR HEADS HUNG AT THE PRISON GATES, RIGHT?! WE GOTTA GAMBLE EVERYTHIN' SO THAT DON'T HAPPEN!
ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, WE'RE GONNA TAKE OVER THIS PRISON!
WE'RE GONNA SPLIT INTO THREE GROUPS, JUST AS WE PLANNED! WE'LL ATTACK THE OBSERVATION POST!

UEMON'S GROUP'S GONNA BUST INTO THE BIG CELL AND THE TWO-*KEN* CELLS! KILL ANYBODY WHO DON'T JOIN US!

KIROKU'S GROUP'S GONNA TAKE CARE OF THE CONSTABLES AND THE WARDEN, OK?!

YEAH, 'AN THE WOMEN'S ROOM TOO.

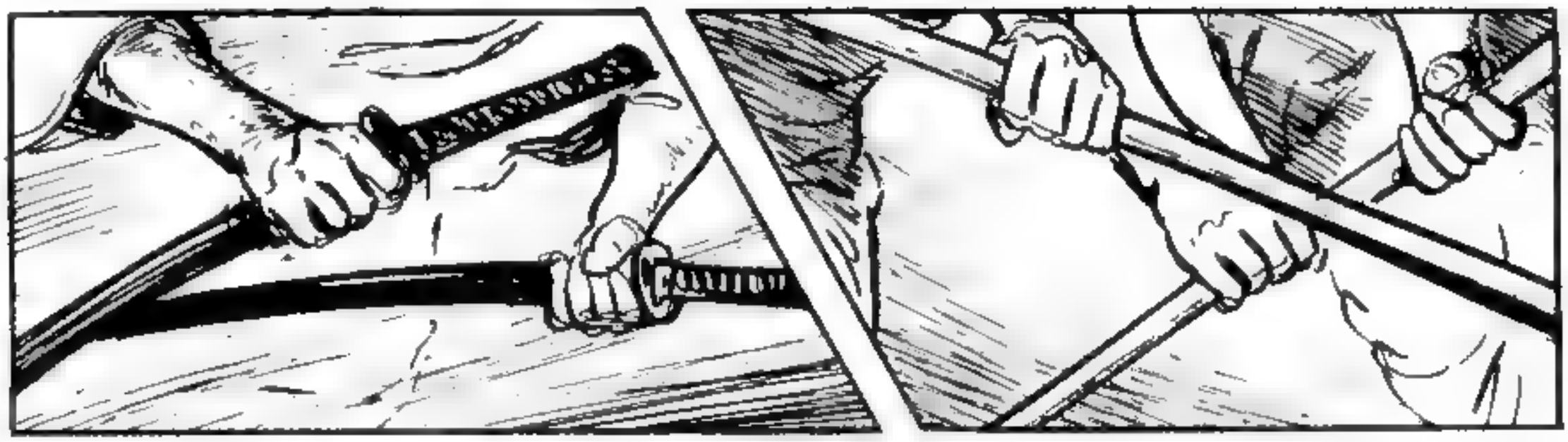
HEH HEH

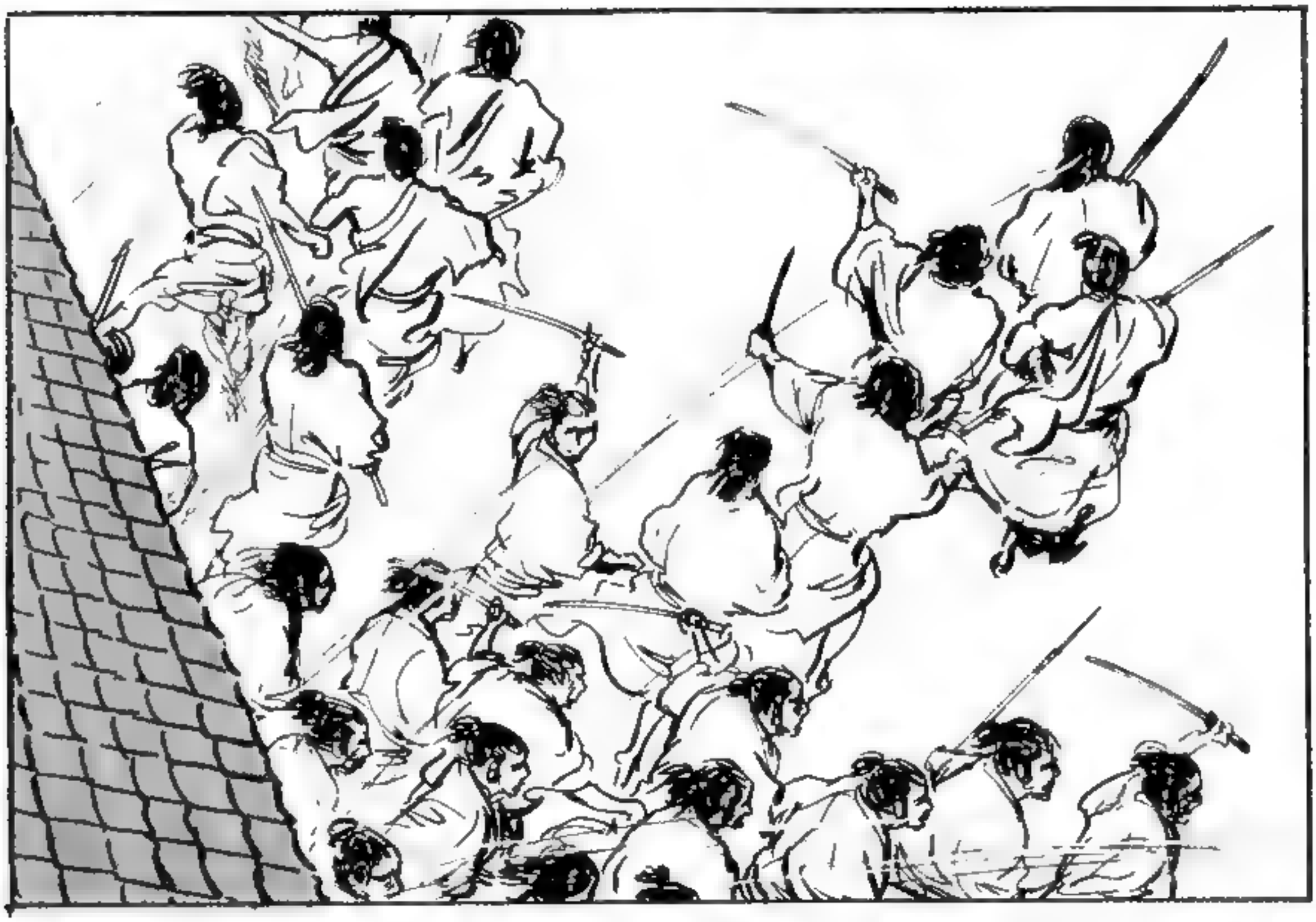
GO FOR IT!!

YEAAAAH!

AHHHH!

AHHHH!



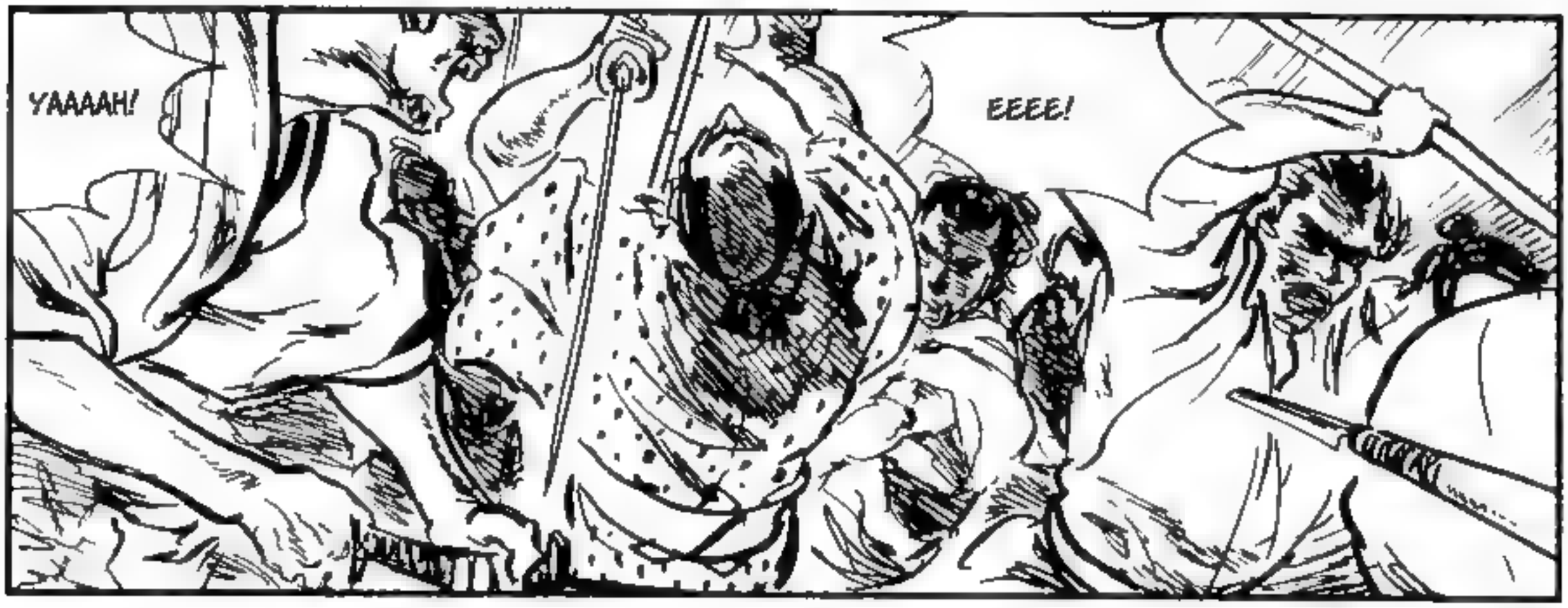


AAAARGH!

GAH!

HELP OUT KIROKU'S GROUP!

GET 'EM!


YAAAAH!
EEEE!

EEEEK!

AAAAH!

YEAAAAAH!

YEAAAAH!

YEAH!

W-WOMEN!

THERE'S THE WOMEN!

EEEEK!

AAAH!

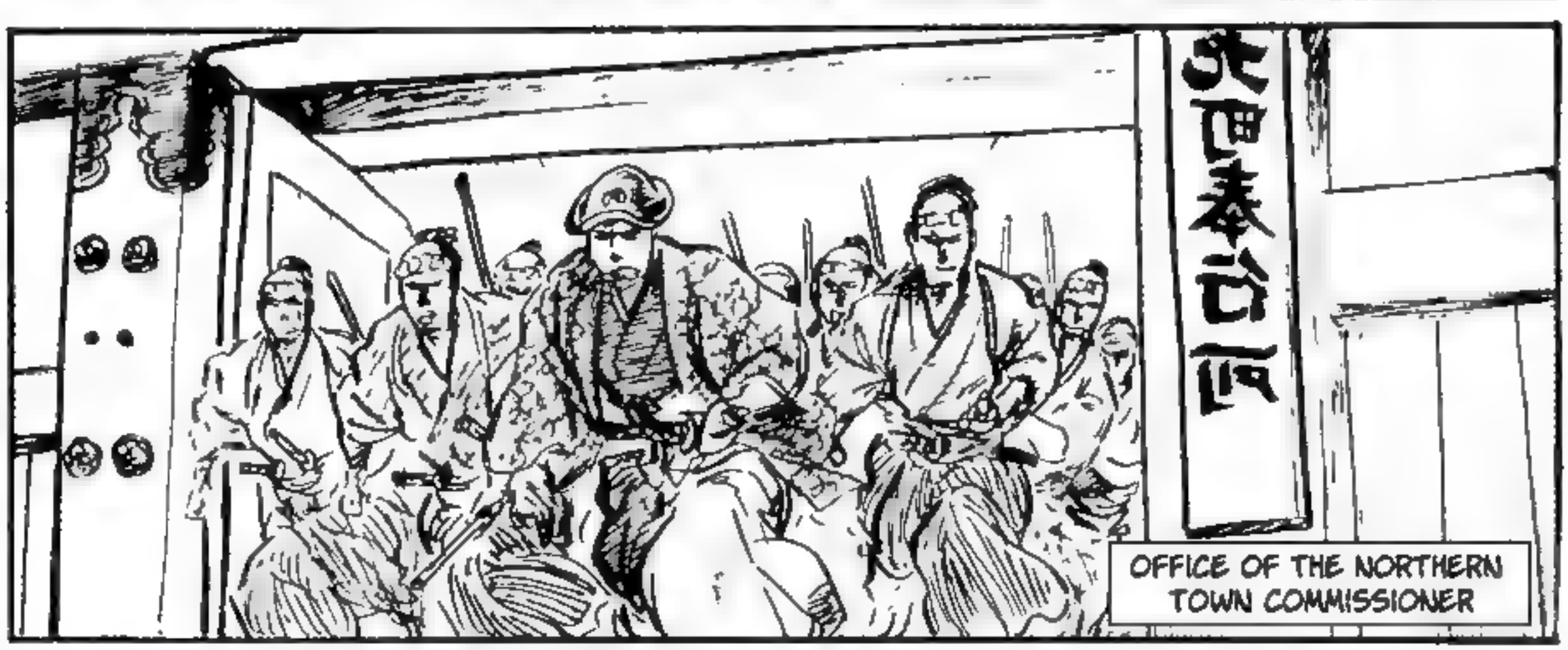
EEEE!

RRRRUP

ON THE SIXTH DAY OF THIS MONTH, AT THE LOWER HOUR OF THE DRAGON.

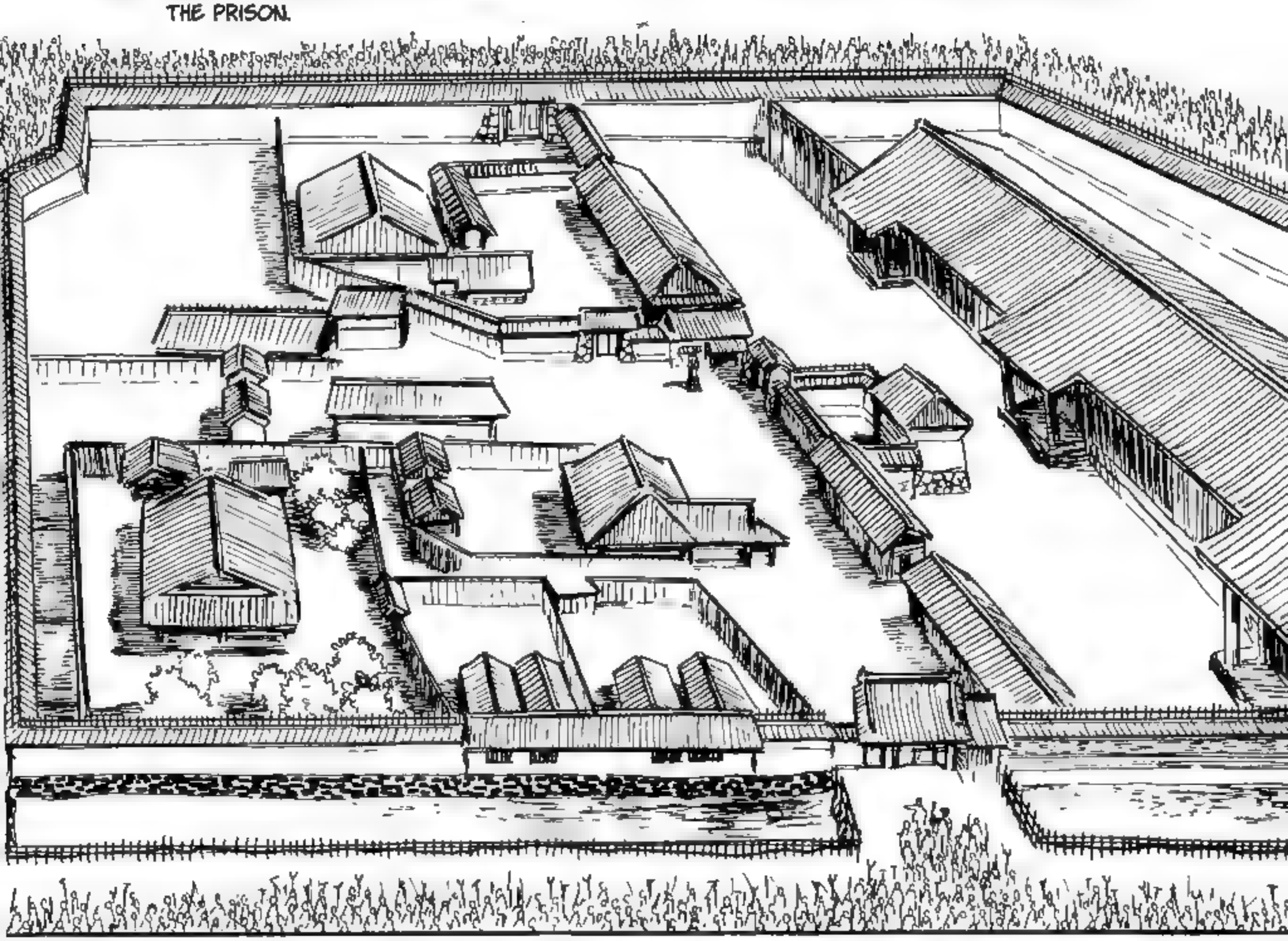
THE VIOLENCE FROM THE WEST WINS SOON ENGULFED THE WHOLE PRISON...

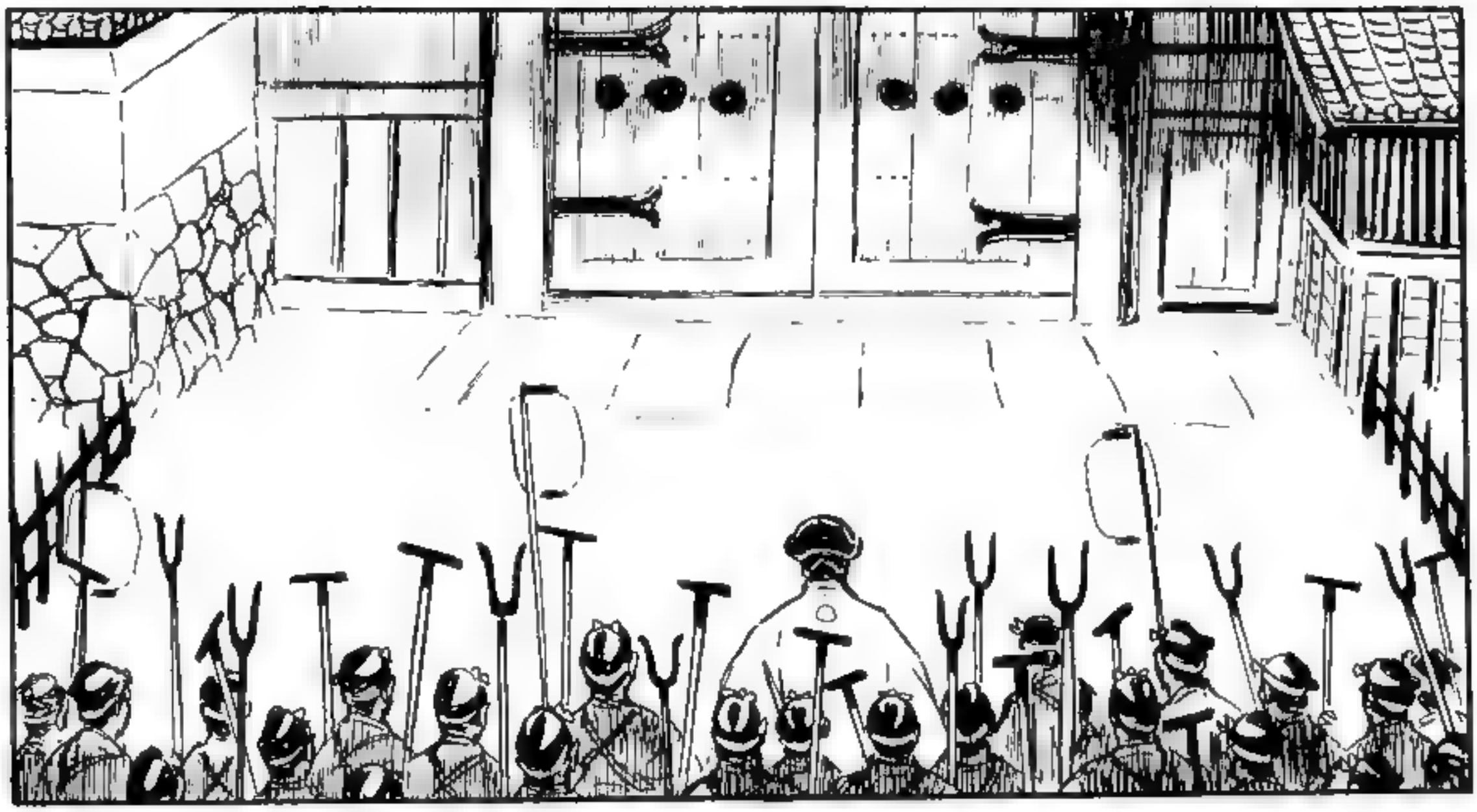
AND AT THE CENTER OF THE STORM WAS A QUINTET OF COUNTERFEITERS: BOLDEN JUBEE, KIROKU, LEMON, TÔSUKE, AND YOSHIZÔ.


OFFICE OF THE NORTHERN
TOWN COMMISSIONER

BOTH THE NORTHERN TOWN COMMISSIONER WHO WAS IN CHARGE THAT MONTH—AND THE SOUTHERN TOWN COMMISSIONER WHO WASN'T—DISPATCHED *ALL* THEIR MEN TO SURROUND THE PRISON.

THEN THE ANTI-ARSON, ANTI-THEFT MEN JOINED IN. THIS STATE OF EMERGENCY WOULD MAKE EDO HISTORY.





AWRIGHT, BREAK DOWN THAT DOOR!

CREEEAK

FEEEAK!

CABLE

THUD!
ARRRRGH!

WHACK!
WHACK!
WHACK!

HA, HA! HEADS AIN'T SO EASY TO CUT OFF! HA, HA!

IT'S 'CAUSE THIS WAS MY *FIRST* TIME! I AIN'T HEAD-CHOPPIN' ASAEMON! HA, HA!

DAMN YOU!

DON'T MOVE!

ONE STEP AND THE WARDEN *DIES!*

DAMN YOU! HEAVEN WON'T FORGIVE YOU FOR WHAT YOU'VE DONE!

DROP YOUR WEAPONS *IMMEDIATELY!* IF YOU DON'T BEHAVE, YOU'RE GONNA GET YOUR HEADS HUNG AT THE PRISON GATES, AND SO WILL YOUR FAMILIES!

YEAH, WHATEVER! GO RIGHT AHEAD! WE'RE *ALL* GONNA DIE ANYWAY, SO WE MIGHT AS WELL GO IN *STYLE!*

THASS RIGHT! IF WE BEHAVE, WE'RE JUST GONNA GET "SET UP" AND GET OUR BALLS CRUSHED AS WE DIE!

WE AIN'T MOVIN'! WE *KNOW* WE'RE GONNA DIE TOMORROW!

IF YA CUT US, WE BLEED! *WE'RE* PEOPLE TOO! HOW ARE *WE* ANY DIFFERENT FROM *YOU*?!

YOU SCUM! FIRST YOU BREAK THE LAW, AND NOW YOU COMMIT EVEN MORE CRIMES!

I CAN'T LET YOU GET AWAY WITH THIS...

WELL, SO WHAT THE HELL IS THE "SET-UP" THEN?

AIN'T *THAT* BREAKIN' THE LAW?!

UH..

CHUNK!

ARRRRGH!

CHUNK!

HA, HA! SAW *THAT*?! WE'LL KILL *ANYBODY*, 'CAUSE WE ALREADY GOT A *HUNDRED* PRISONERS--THE WARDEN, THE CONSTABLES, GUARDS, AN' THE WOMEN!

HRM...
...

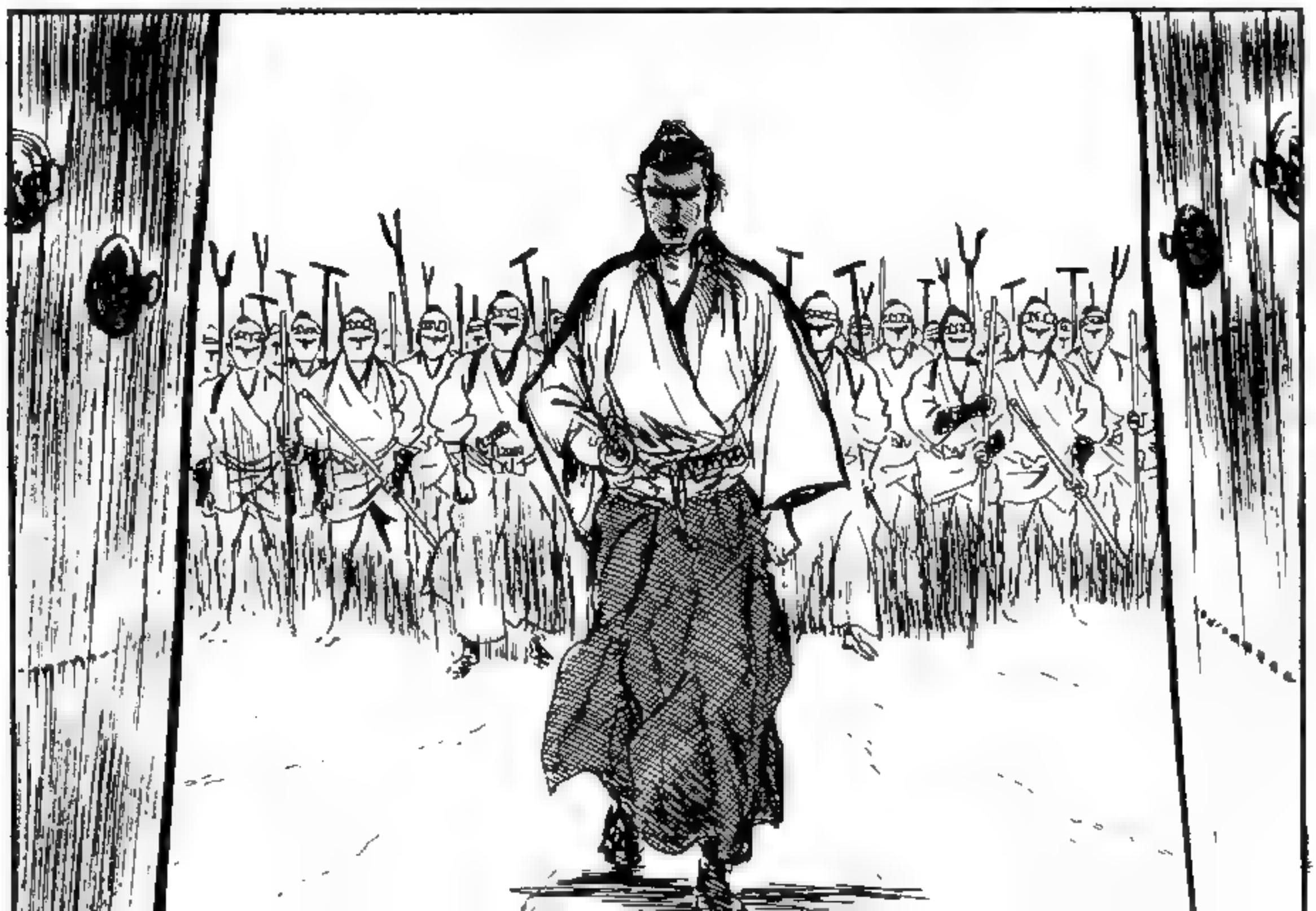
GET A THOUSAND-KOKU SEA-GOIN' SHIP READY OFF THE COAST OF SHINAGAWA!
BRING ALL THE RICE, MISO, AND WATER YA CAN! POTS, PANS, 'N' FIREWOOD TOO!

ONCE WE'RE ABOARD, WE'LL DUMP THE PRISONERS INTO THE SEA.
WE NEED MONEY TOO! FIVE THOUSAND-RYŌ BOXES WOULD BE NICE.
GOT IT?! BREAK UP YER CIRCLE!

MPH...
...
WHASS WRONG?!

I-IT'S DECAPITATOR ASA!
A-ASAEMON!

I-IT'S DECAPITATOR ASA!



HE CAN'T BE COMIN' HERE!

JTCH
JTCH

WE DON'T NEED YOU!
Y-YA FRIGGIN' KILLER! Y-YA AIN'T COMIN' HERE!

SH-SHUT THE DOORS!

CREEAK

KERTHUNK

KERTHUNK

WHOOSH!

CLUNK

PLONK

GRRTEEAK

COME ANY CLOSER...

'AN I'M GONNA KILL 'IM!

TOO BAD.

W- WHAT?!

ALL OF THEM WILL HAVE TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY AND COMMIT *SEPPUKU*...

THAT'S WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A *WARRIOR.*

THEY SHOULD ALREADY BE PREPARED TO *DIE!*

OHHH...

I *WILL* CUT OFF YOUR HEADS. IT'S ONLY A QUESTION OF TIME.

K-KILL 'IM!

K-KILL THIS *DEMON!*

LET'S DO IT!

GO TO HELL!

DSHHHHH!

WHOOP!

Dhhh

Dhhh

Dhhh

OHHH...

SH-SHIT...

ARRRRGH!

GASP!

WHOOSH!

AT THIS MOMENT, ASAEMON THE EXECUTIONER WAS SAID TO HAVE LOOKED LIKE A *DEMON*...

THE GOVERNMENT TOOK RESPONSIBILITY FOR THIS REVOLT. WARDEN ISHIDE WAS NOT REPRIMANDED. AND THE DECAPITATIONS BEGAN ONCE MORE.

GLOSSARY

agariya
Cell for retainers and other unconvicted high-ranking people.

bugei
Martial arts.

bushi
A samurai. A member of the warrior class.

bushidō
The way of the warrior. Also known as shidō.

chikaramochi
Strength-giving *mochi*.

cho
Approximately 300 meters. Also, a section of a city.

daikan
An official who collected taxes owed to Edo and oversaw public works, agriculture, and other projects administered by the central government.

daikansho
The office of the *daikan*.

daimyō
A feudal lord.

dainagon
Chief councillor of state.

Edo
The capital of medieval Japan and the seat of the shōgunate. The site of modern-day Tokyo.

gokenin
Lower grade retainer.

han
A feudal domain.

hatamoto
A samurai directly under the shōgun.

hiyameshikui
Literally, "cold rice eater." Term of contempt for second sons who are not heirs.

honorifics
Japan is a class and status society, and proper forms of address are critical. Common markers of respect are the prefixes o and go, and a wide range of suffixes. Some of the suffixes you will encounter in *Lone Wolf and Cub*:

chan – for children, young women, and close friends

dono – archaic; used for higher-ranked or highly respected figures

san – the most common, used among equals or near-equals

sama – used for superiors

sensei – used for teachers, masters, respected entertainers, and politicians.

hour of the horse
Between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m.

hyō
Bag. Refers to the amount of rice that *kashiwagi* received.

ihai
Buddhist mortuary tablet.

jikisan
A samurai directly under the shogun.

kan
A bundle of a thousand copper coins.

ken
Old unit of measure. Approximately two yards.

kobushingumi
Literally, "small builders group." consisted of samurai without official appointments who still received a salary.

koku
A bale of rice.

lower hour of the dragon
8:20 to 9:00 a.m.

matamono
A *daimyō's* retainer, unlike a *jikisan* directly under the shogun.

mochi
A sticky rice cake made by pounding sweet rice with mallets.

mochitsu motaretsu
Giving and taking; making mochi may take energy, but eating it gives energy.

mon
A copper coin.

monme, fun, rin
Units of currency. One *monme* was worth 10 *fun*, and one *fun* was worth 10 *rin*.

nagamochi
Having longevity.

rōnanushi
Prisoner in charge of other prisoners.

rōnin
A masterless samurai. Literally, "one adrift on the waves." Members of the samurai caste who have lost their masters through the dissolution of *han*, expulsion for misbehavior, or other reasons. Prohibited from working as farmers or merchants under the strict Confucian caste system imposed by the Tokugawa shōgunate, many impoverished *rōnin* became "hired guns" for whom the code of the samurai was nothing but empty words.

ryō
Gold piece.

sengoku
Warring states. For two centuries between the old central rule in Kyoto and the rise of Oda Nobunaga (1534-1582), the first unifier of Japan, the country was in a state of anarchy, riven by constant civil war between rival warlords.

seventh hour
Between 3 and 5 p.m.

suemonogiri
Cutting through a stationary object.

to
A measure of capacity equal to 4.8 gallons.

tomomochi
Literally, "having friends." Here, "let's be friends."

tsubo
Old unit of measure. Roughly four square yards.

KAZUO KOIKE

Though widely respected as a powerful writer of graphic fiction, Kazuo Koike has spent a lifetime reaching beyond the bounds of the comics medium. Aside from co-creating and writing such classic manga as *Lone Wolf and Cub* and *Crying Freeman*, Koike has hosted the popular *Shibi Golf Weekly* instructional television program; founded the *Albatross View* golf magazine; produced movies; written popular fiction, poetry, and screenplays; and mentored some of Japan's best manga talent.

Koike started *the Gekiga Sonjuku*, a college course aimed at helping talented writers and artists—such as *Ranma* 1/2 creator Rumiko Takahashi—break into the comics field. His methods and teachings continue to influence new generations of manga creators, not to mention artists and writers around the world. Examples of Koike's influence range from the comics works of Frank Miller and Stan Sakai to the films of Quentin Tarantino.

The driving focus of Koike's narrative is character development, and his commitment to the character is clear: "Comics are carried by characters. If a character is well-created, the comic becomes a hit." Kazuo Koike's continued success in comics and literature has proven this philosophy true.

Kazuo Koike continues to work in the entertainment media to this very day, consistently diversifying his work and forging new paths across the rough roads of Edo-period history and the green swaths of today's golfing world.

GOSEKI KOJIMA

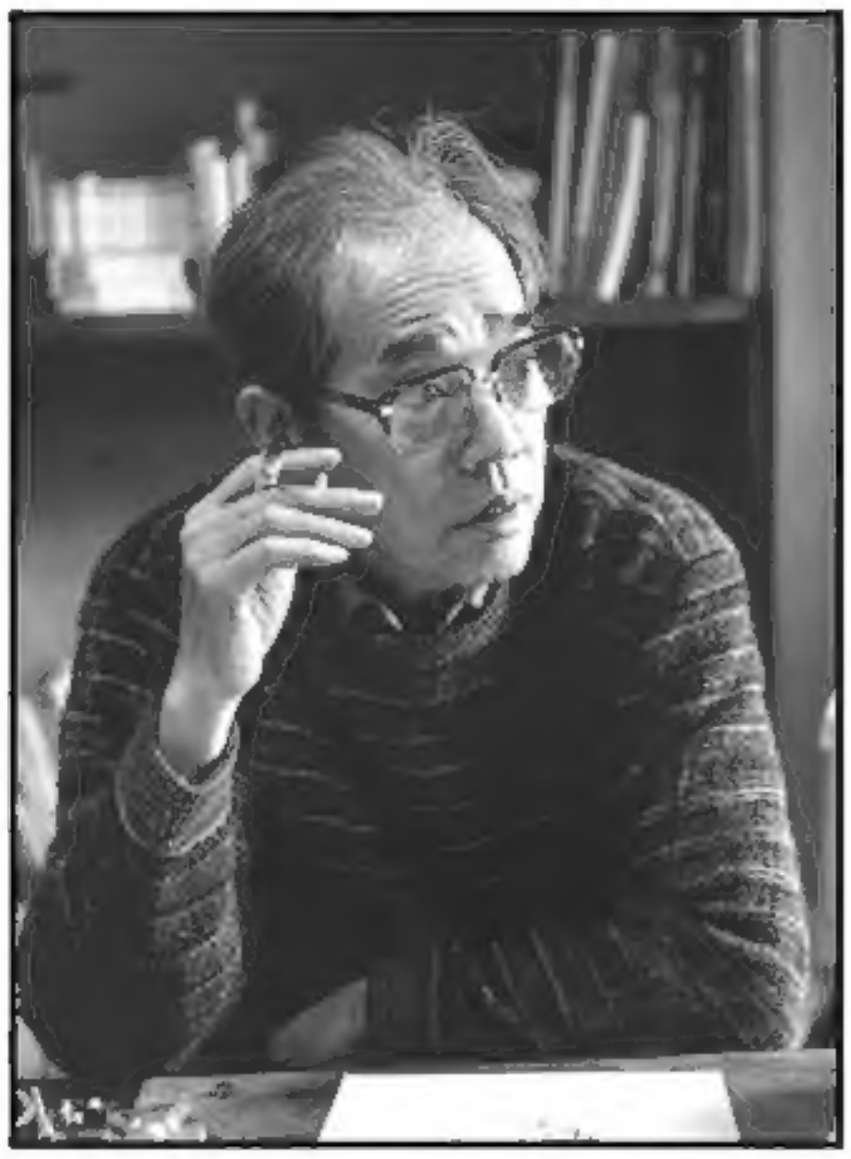
Goseki Kojima was born on November 3, 1928, the very same day as the godfather of Japanese comics, Osamu Tezuka. Art was a Kojima family tradition, his own father an amateur portrait artist and his great-great-grandfather a sculptor.

In 1950, Kojima moved to Tokyo, where the postwar devastation had given rise to special manga forms for audiences too poor to buy the new manga magazines just starting to reach the newsstands. Kojima created art for *kami-shibai*, or "paper-play" narrators, who would use manga story sheets to present narrated street plays, and later moved on to creating works for the *kashi-bon* market, bookstores that rented out books, magazines, and manga to mostly low-income readers.

In 1967, Kojima broke into the magazine market with his ninja adventure, *Dojinki*. As the manga magazine market grew and diversified, he turned out a steady stream of popular samurai manga series.

In 1970, in collaboration with Kazuo Koike, Kojima began the work that would seal his reputation, *Kozure Okami (Lone Wolf and Cub)*. Many additional series would follow, including this related series, *Samurai Executioner.*

In his final years, Kojima turned to creating original graphic novels based on the movies of his favorite director, the great Akira Kurosawa. Kojima passed away on January 5, 2000 at the age of 71.



A frenetic mix of samurai honor, violence, and bloody beheadings, *Samurai Executioner* is not for the light of heart. But, for those who love blood and guts crime drama, historical fiction, and brutal action, this is right up your alley. The men who brought you *Lone Wolf & Cub* also created Kubikiri Asa, a young ronin samurai who helps keep the peace by putting the fear of beheading into Edo's criminals.

Full of squirting blood, fast paced samurai sword-work, and the drama that comes from human corruption, *Samurai Executioner* is like no other classic manga.

Published for the first time in America in the Japanese format.

Punished is not the man himself, but the evil that resides in him.

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FOR READERS 18+
FOR MATURE READERS